

# Writers of To-day

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*Edited by*  
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SIDGWICK AND JACKSON

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1946

MADE AND PRINTED BY GALE AND POLDEN LIMITED, IDEAL HOUSE,  
ARGYLL STREET, LONDON, W.1, *at their* WELLINGTON PRESS, ALDERSHOT

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NINE of these twelve studies have been especially written for this book. The studies of Graham Greene and Edith Sitwell are reprinted from *Penguin New Writing*, and the study of E. M. Forster is a revised version of a longer work that first appeared in *Now*. Acknowledgments are due to the editors of both these magazines for permission to reprint.

## Note

DURING recent years it has become a literary fashion to classify writing and writers into various schools or movements, each with its appropriate decorative label. While this has produced interesting and provocative criticism, it has sometimes detracted from more detailed consideration of individual writers. There would seem to be a real need for a series of critical studies of the work of those contemporaries whose achievements have already established them among the most important writers of our time. At the same time such studies would appear most valuable if presented, not from the point of view of some literary "party line," but simply as assessments by critics of varying outlooks united, perhaps solely, by a personal interest in the work of their subjects. .

The object of *Writers of To-day* is to fulfil that need as far as possible ; not, obviously, within the limits of a single book, but through a series. For the first volume, the editor has endeavoured to select subjects whose work, to a large extent, belongs to different aspects of writing. They include English, Irish, American, French, Spanish, and Hungarian writers. In future volumes it is hoped to include studies of the works of Ernest Hemingway, Sean O'Casey, André Malraux, Ignazio Silone, H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, William Saroyan, Herbert Read, W. H. Auden, Thomas Mann, Henry Miller, Somerset Maugham, Jacques Maritain, among others.



# Aldous Huxley



J. B. COATES

ALDOUS HUXLEY's early works were produced in the period of cynicism and disillusionment which may come to be symbolized in literary history by Eliot's *Waste Land*. The writers of the previous generation, such men as Galsworthy, Russell, Shaw and Wells, were primarily interested in social criticism and social reconstruction. Implicit in their work was an optimism as to the social fruits of the liberal and rationalistic thought which they expressed. (The young men of the early nineteen-twenties were not hopeful about the world's political future, nor were their minds turned towards social issues. Implied, though not usually explicit, in their attitude was a valid realization that the Shaw and Wells school had misjudged the moral and cultural issues involved in the great problems of our day.) The preoccupation of the new generation was with moral and aesthetic questions, with their own personal problems, with the problem of the Split Man, which was so predominantly the problem of the time, the problem of their cynicism, their futile pleasures and lusts. What T. S. Eliot's poetry is primarily impressed with is the moral breakdown of his contemporaries, their lack of interior life, their "hollowness." His interpretation leads him to call for a return to religion, for an acceptance of spiritual tradition and of the authority of the Church. Eliot's solutions were too facile. Aldous Huxley had a more complex nature than Eliot; he faced what were essentially the same problems, but his interpretation of them was both more subtle and less assured, and his development was different.

Aldous Huxley was faced not only with the problems characteristic of his age, but with a special problem peculiar to himself. (It is probable that his temperamental idiosyncrasies were intensified by his three years of partial blindness as a boy, which cut him off from his fellows and helped to create the aloofness

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which became his outstanding personal quality. Also he was congenitally an intellectual of intellectuals, and nothing leads more to an intensely critical relationship to other people, with a lack of disposition to identify oneself emotionally with them, than an innate intellectual superiority.) Huxley's temperamental problems assumed three forms, he found it difficult to achieve satisfactory personal relationships; he had an incapacity for action, a disposition, like that of Hamlet, to "brood too precisely over the event"; and he had, along with an intense appreciation of certain aspects of experience, notably the sensual and emotional aspects, a greatly diminished capacity for gaining the satisfactions craved for. *Crome Yellow*, his first novel, is to some extent a study of a youthful Hamlet, with Denis a young man of Huxley's own temperament. Like Huxley, he was ousted in his search for love by men whose susceptibility and whose longings were much less intense than his.

One of Huxley's early poems vividly and amusingly exposes his dilemma.

"While I have been fumbling over books  
And thinking about God and the Devil and all,  
Other young men have been battling with the days,  
And others have been kissing the beautiful women.  
They have brazen faces like battering rams.  
But I who think about books and such—  
I crumble to impotent dust before the struggling,  
And the women palsy me with fear.  
But when it comes to fumbling over books,  
And thinking about God and the devil and all,  
Why, there I am.  
But perhaps the battering rams are in the right of it,  
Perhaps, perhaps. . . God knows."

(Huxley's reaction to his personal difficulties was to formulate his doctrine of wholeness, of balanced excess. A man, in his view, should develop and express every aspect and potentiality of his nature, but he should do so by giving free rein to each side of his nature in turn. To be merely an intellectual was an appalling limitation. But it would be just as much a limitation to be completely dissolved in spiritual aspiration, or to be a mere sensualist.) Huxley came to believe that his sympathies were with the ancient Greeks, not with Christianity, because the Greeks

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served all the Gods instead of merely the one God who was Spirit. "Man has a mind; very well, let him think. Senses that enjoy; let him be sensual. Instincts: they are there to be satisfied. Passions: it does a man good to succumb to them from time to time. Imagination, a feeling for beauty, a sense of awe; let him create, let him surround himself with lovely forms, let him worship. Man is multifarious, inconsistent, self-contradictory; the Greeks accepted the fact, and lived multifariously, inconsistently and contradictorily. Their polytheism gave divine sanction to this realistic acceptance."

The story of Gumbriel in *Antic Hay* is the story of his quest for wholeness, and it is indicative of the character of Huxley's personal problem that what Gumbriel found most disturbing was his incapacity for satisfactory emotional and sensual relationships. Huxley brings his reflections to a head on this issue, his supreme early preoccupation, in *Point Counterpoint*. (Almost all the characters in this great novel are spiritually maimed through developing only one side of their being. Webley is the mere man of action; Bidlake the mere sensualist; Philip Quarles is the pure intellectual, the type of person Huxley tended to be himself and hated himself for being. Burlap, the devotee of pure spirit, is the least sympathetic of the types; Huxley chooses to portray the man whose passion is for spiritual experience as the hypocrite, on the ground that the senses always avenge themselves if scorned.) At this stage Huxley's strongest aversion, it is clear, is to the exaltation of what D. H. Lawrence called "the sympathetic upper centre of spiritual love-emotion," believed by him to be a great source to-day of both mental and physical disorders. Rampion, the character in *Point Counterpoint* whose nature was able to "include and harmonize" every form of experience, is drawn from D. H. Lawrence. As Burlap is the most unfair study in *Point Counterpoint*, so Rampion is the least successful. Rampion does not seem to be a real person; he is a mere mouthpiece for what Huxley considered to be D. H. Lawrence's philosophy.

The attitude of Huxley to the lives of the young men of his generation savoured less of the moralist than that of Eliot. It did not distress Huxley greatly that his contemporaries were lacking in religious belief and found no meaning in life. He himself saw no meaning in life, nor did he particularly wish to

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find a meaning. (It interested and amused him to observe the ironic contrasts, the self division within the human personality. He could at once be intensely attracted to the mystical approach to experience and be completely sceptical about it; he could long intensely for the earthly paradise, for the delights of sun-warmed flesh and of wine, and yet almost consciously accept the temperamental inhibitions which hindered him from sensual gratification.) He could appreciate every form of approach to the human problem while inveighing against its limitations. (He could, in one and the same person, be religious and sceptical, sensual and ascetic, cynical and humanitarian.) The fluidity of the nature of the earlier Huxley, his power of assimilation, not only of ideas but of words and of attitudes, and the difficulty he found in identifying himself with any standpoint, except, on the whole, that to which he was temperamentally disposed, that of the cool, aloof, almost indifferent observer, are a partial explanation of many of the technical characteristics of the early novels. He aims specially in these works at the effects of ironic contrast and anti-climax. He places side by side the sublime beauty of a Beethoven quartette, with its counterpoint of the most impassioned intensity and the purest and deepest serenity, with its achievement of a perfection so heavenly that as one listens one knows that God exists, with the grossest description of the physical means by which the music was produced, Pongileoni's snout, the stretched intestines of lambs, the scratching of the gramophone needle.) It is Spandiell, who commits a senseless and brutal murder for the sheer love of evil, who best realizes the sublimities of religious experience, and seeks to convince Rampion of the existence of God. It is Burlap who, having in a mood of devotion unctuously accepted God and rejected the world, proceeds to enjoy a bath with Beatrice, like two little children together, his happiness not diminished by his having just made £1,000 and heard of the death of an inconvenient secretary.

(Like the lady novelist, Miss Thriplow, in *Those Barren Leaves*, Huxley wished in his early novels to create "a chemical compound of all the categories." His novels were to contain lightness and tragedy and loveliness and wit and fantasy and realism and irony and sentiment all combined. He was to see reality with every kind of eye at once, with the biologist's eye, the chemist's, the physician's, the historian's eye, with the religious

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eye, the scientific eye, the economic eye, the sensual eye. His wit, his comedy, his irony, depend largely upon the contrast between these varied approaches to reality.)

The title of his most ambitious early novel indicates the primary æsthetic aim of his early work. His art depends upon counterpoint, with the fundamental theme the division within the human psyche.

“What meaneth nature by these diverse laws,  
Passion and reason, self-division's cause?”

Among the strongest literary influences on the early Huxley were those of French writers. His first novels owe some of their lightness, their clarity, their grace, their irony, their scepticism, to Anatole France. Huxley's style, and especially the style of his poetry, and his choice of themes both in poetry and prose, owe much to Rimbaud, Verlaine and Baudelaire. From Baudelaire arose his interest in the problem of Satanism, the love of evil for its own sake. Coleman in *Antic Hay* and Spandrell in *Point Counterpoint* were Satanists, and in his brilliant essay on Baudelaire Huxley made a masterly analysis of Satanism. But it was D. H. Lawrence who exercised the profoundest influence on Huxley's mind in its first phase. Huxley said of Lawrence in 1927, “D. H. L. is one of the few people I feel real respect and admiration for. Of most other eminent people I have met I feel that at any rate I belong to the same species as they do. But this man has something different and superior in kind, not degree.”

The attraction of Huxley to Lawrence was largely an attraction of opposites. Huxley was temperamentally a critic and intellectual; Lawrence was essentially a poet, a man of intense emotional drives. Lawrence taught a religion of the primitive, he experienced and sought a new sensuous and sensual awareness and believed that the senses should be worshipped for their own sake. No one could have been less of a primitive than Huxley, and no one could have felt more keenly his personal limitations in the field of the experience of the senses. Huxley came to recognize the limitations of Lawrence's philosophy, itself a rationalization of his nostalgia for the primitive, and came to realize that it was an error to imagine that a return to the primitive was possible. “The advance from primitivism to civilization . . . is a progress whose price is fixed; there are no discounts even for the most talented purchasers. I thought once . . . that

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it was possible to make very nearly the best of both worlds . . . this, I believe, was a delusion. The price that has to be paid for intellect and spirit is never reduced to any significant extent." But the influence of Lawrence on the philosophy of Huxley's *Do What You Will* and on the implied philosophy of *Point Counterpoint* is very considerable.

*Brave New World*, published in 1932, was the last novel of Huxley's to be marked by the quality of brilliant and perverse wit that was one of the outstanding characteristics of his early work. (It is also his first novel to be marked by strong political interests. It is a prophetic work. Written before Hitler came into power, it foresaw some of the most terrifying developments of modern totalitarianism, developments which have been declared by many thinkers to be tending to the annihilation of the personality of man.) In *Brave New World* man is annihilated. The creatures of this perfectly planned world have ceased to be human; they are *things* to be moulded at will by the World Controller. Yet Huxley represents them as being happy, as healthy and lovely to look at. It may be doubted whether man can so far lose his soul as to be happy on a merely animal level. The Infant (born obscenely from his mother's body—the word "mother" was obscene in the *Brave New World*) who intrudes into the *Brave New World* from the Savage Reservation, armed with his treasury of poetical conceptions and exquisite images from Shakespeare, finds its cheerful and hygienic inhabitants indescribably repulsive. Pain and evil he regards as a cheap price to pay for the sublimities and glories of poetry and religion. (The conviction expressed by Huxley in *Brave New World* of the tremendous dangers of social planning, of the abuses to which biological and psychological knowledge is subject in large-scale modern societies, has never left him.)

Shortly after the publication of *Brave New World* Huxley came under two new influences, so profound as to cause what was in effect a religious conversion, as well as a marked change in his literary style, the influences of Matthias Alexander and Gerald Heard. The influence of Gerald Heard has been particularly far-reaching. (Huxley became interested in Alexander's technique for bodily awareness and muscular control, but it was the psychological and social implications of Alexander's methods which interested him most. Alexander taught that it was useless in

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attempting to cure physical ailments to attend to symptoms. The underlying cause of the symptoms, which lay in some bodily maladjustment expressing itself in faulty posture and having repercussions on every mode of bodily activity, must receive treatment, and it was essential first to inhibit wrong uses of the body. Huxley came to believe that practically the whole of the supposed social and political remedies sponsored by the Left and Progressive parties were based on treating symptoms instead of fundamental causes. These underlying causes were moral and psychological, but it occurred to no important political party or group to attempt to find a remedy for moral and psychological evils. At the root of all human problems, then, was that of the integration and right adjustment of the human soul. Huxley came to realize that he had never seriously attempted to effect a right adjustment of his own personality, to establish right relationships with his fellows and with society, and to create harmony within himself. He had been content with a philosophy of self-expression. If he had sought intellectual and spiritual ends, had pursued what was popularly supposed to be the higher life, it was because, to him, the congenital intellectual, intellectual activity was fun. The great novel which Huxley wrote under the new influence, *Eyeless in Gaza*, is the record of his conversion. The youthful Anthony Beavis lived for free self-expression; incidentally he pursued sensual gratification as an end in itself. Beavis pursued Helen with lust, but would not give her his love because that would have limited his freedom. A dog which fell from an aeroplane and scattered entrails and blood over the lovers as they sun-bathed on a roof symbolizes the disgust Beavis came later to feel for this loveless bodily communion. For a wager Beavis sought irresponsibly to win the favours of Joan Thursley, to whom his close friend Brian was betrothed and devoted. Through this act the naively idealistic Brian committed suicide. Huxley seems to wish to show that to seek sexual pleasure without taking full responsibility for the rightness of the human relationships involved could lead only to evil. Through the influence of Miller (drawn more from Gerald Heard than from Alexander) Beavis experiences the same kind of intellectual and moral upheaval which Huxley experienced.

Huxley's conversion to pacifism at this time was based on the belief that all attempts to deal with the problem of aggression

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by the threat and use of violence against the aggressor would not only fail in their purpose but would intensify the evils they were intended to remedy. (These evils at bottom were psychological; the use of violence by a so-called "peace-loving" state would only strengthen those psychological tendencies within that state which made for its own future use of aggression.) Pacifism to Huxley was much more than a political doctrine; it was a religious faith. It was a belief that the evils of war and of economic exploitation could only be remedied through love, through the spirit of unity and communion, and that love would only increase in so far as individuals were prepared to detach themselves from their passions and appetites and attach themselves to that underlying spiritual reality which they could find within themselves and which the mystics taught was the immanent God. In *Eyefers in Gaza* Anthony Beavis, the man who had always shrunk from public occasions, learned a new quality of courage which made him capable of facing a hostile crowd. Pacifism, as Huxley understood it, was the way to learn a new capacity for courage and disinterestedness.

*Ends and Means* is the Confession of Faith of the later Huxley as *Do What You Will* is of the earlier. In this work Huxley teaches that the central doctrine of religion is non-attachment. (Man must learn to detach himself from his impulses, even from those which may seem to be good. His only attachment must be to the highest ideal, to God.) The social conceptions put forward in *Ends and Means* are the application of psychological and ethical concepts to the problems of our day.

During the Second Great War Huxley has lived in California. He has retained his pacifist convictions, and this has led him, in view of the attitudes, involving a universal belief in violence, now prevailing in the world, to embrace a species of political defeatism. He is convinced that policies are being pursued which will lead to further and worse disasters, yet he feels that little can be done about it. All he is now attempting to do is to endeavour in co-operation with a few others to build in miniature the kind of society which might be set up more widely at a later period. Propter in *After Many a Summer* has given a vivid statement of this defeatism of Huxley's. Having expressed his keen desire to help the masses of humanity, Propter goes on to say: "You've got to do something about them. But at the same time



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there are circumstances where you can't do anything. You can't do anything effective about anyone if he doesn't choose or isn't able to collaborate with you in doing the right thing. For example, you've got to help people who are being killed off with malaria. But in practice you can't help them if they refuse to screen their windows and insist on taking walks near stagnant water in the twilight. It's exactly the same with the diseases of the body politic. You've got to help people if they're faced by want or ruin or enslavement, if they're under the menace of sudden revolution or slow degeneration. You've got to help. But the fact remains, nevertheless, that you can't help if they persist in the course of behaviour which originally got them into their trouble. For example, you can't preserve people from the horrors of war if they won't give up the pleasures of nationalism. You can't save them from slumps and depressions so long as they go on thinking in terms of money and regarding money as the supreme God. You can't arrest revolution and enslavement if they will identify progress with the increase of centralization, and prosperity with the intensifying of mass production. You can't preserve them from collective madness or suicide if they persist in paying divine honours to ideas which are merely projections of their own personalities—in other words, if they persist in worshipping themselves rather than God. So much for conditional clauses. Now let's consider the actual facts of the present situation. For our purposes, the most significant facts are these: (the inhabitants of every civilised country are menaced; all desire, passionately to be saved from impending disaster; the overwhelming majority refuse to change their habits of thought, feeling and action which are directly responsible for their present plight. In other words, they can't be helped because they are not prepared to collaborate with any helper who proposes a rational and realistic course of action.)

In the existing state of the world very few people are capable of the detachment needed for an objective consideration of whether or not the basis of Huxley's gloomy prognostications is valid. But it is certainly extremely doubtful whether a realistic view of the state of the world in 1945 at the end of nearly six years of war conduces to optimism.

The remedy for our social evils which Huxley had embraced in *Ends and Means* was that of a religious transformation. In

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*Grey Eminence* Huxley has written a brilliant and penetrating study of Father Joseph, a monk who was the counsellor of Richelieu and a powerful statesman, and sought through political power to advance religious ends. The result of Friar Joseph's attempt was, in Huxley's view, disastrous. His noble intentions did not save him from committing numberless crimes and using every kind of bad means to secure his "good" ends. *Grey Eminence* expresses Huxley's conviction that good ethical and social ends cannot be secured by the use of the state power, and that there is no means by which right religious ends can be achieved through the technique of large-scale organization, or any form of power or use of propaganda.) There is, in fact, no short cut to the millennium. The slow method of human betterment by the leavening influence of saintly persons and of small groups living in fellowship on the basis of a genuine desire for spiritual enlightenment is the only valid and only effective and realistic one.

During the 1939-1945 period, Huxley has published two novels, *After Many a Summer* and *Time Must Have a Stop*—the first appearing soon after the beginning of the war, the second early in 1945. *After Many a Summer* is not a pleasant book. It contains much that is physically and morally loathsome. The scenes in which the old Baron and his female associate are discovered in their underground retreat are disgusting and repellent. Politically, as we have seen, the book is defeatist. Huxley seems to be unable to believe that humanity can do anything with the new powers science has provided but perpetrate crimes and create catastrophes on an unprecedented scale. (Huxley seems to regard the power of human reason, unchecked by spiritual "enlightenment," as in tendency pernicious. The Baron, who reaches such depths of degradation, is nothing if not a rationalist.) The moral and physical consequences of the discovery of the secret of rejuvenation in *After Many a Summer* are as nauseating as were the applications of biological and psychological science in *Brave New World*.

Huxley's most recent novel, *Time Must Have a Stop*, is remarkable for its sustained virtuosity. The uniform brilliance of the style has not been surpassed by Huxley himself, if by any other writer. The theme and its treatment indeed present few novel factors. As in *Eyeless in Gaza*, the main action is concerned with

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the purification of the hero; also, as in the earlier work, the faults of the hero, faults which might almost be regarded as venial, have tragic consequences. Beavis's irresponsibility leads indirectly to Brian's suicide; Sebastian's cowardice and evasion are the occasion of the death of his wife and of the sufferings of Bruno in a concentration camp. Faults of this character would not normally entail such grave consequences; in his anxiety to castigate the insensitiveness of our age to moral lapses, Huxley deliberately weights the scales against them. The relationship between Sebastian and Bruno in the later novel resembles that of Beavis and Miller in *Eyeless in Gaza*. *Time Must Have a Stop* resembles *Point Counterpoint* in that the main characters are types carefully selected by Huxley for critical dissection in the light of the ideal presented by one figure held up for our respect; Bruno plays the part played by Rampion in the earlier work, but the concept of perfection has changed. Veronica Thwale is in the tradition of the Satanists of Huxley's early books; Veronica was brought up amongst saintly people but made a deliberate choice of evil, just as she was consciously perverse in her sensuality.

The cruellest portrait of the book is that of John Barnack, ascetically devoted to social causes. The bitterness of the picture reveals a real animus on Huxley's part against men who are seeking political salvation in large scale planning. John's tireless endeavours leave him harsh, intolerant, sapless and devoid of inner life. Eustace Barnack, in comparison, is a sympathetic personality. Nevertheless Huxley sends the devotee of aestheticism and sensuality quite literally to Hell. The passage in which Eustace, having died in his lavatory, seeks shelter from the divine radiance in fragments of the ego which he loved on earth is a *tour de force*. Huxley succeeds magnificently in his portrayal of his hero, Sebastian, and the mystic, Bruno. Bruno remains human and lovable in his saintliness and detachment; Sebastian is a memorable study of the youthful poet, hypersensitive, anguished, mean, sensual, self-conscious, beautiful, compassionate yet cruel.

*Time Must Have a Stop* is sufficiently precise in its teaching. There is only one Way, a return to God. If there is only a million to one chance that our social salvation can be so secured, there is no chance at all of a remedy through politics. A few saintly persons might have immense influence; meanwhile the only basis for a better social order is a shared metaphysic. This cannot be speci-

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fically Christian, for its basis must be the common insight of all the great religions. This recent work of Huxley's provides reassurance for those of his admirers who feared that Huxley the mystic would destroy Huxley the novelist. The characteristic contribution of Huxley to the English novel has perhaps never been displayed more richly than in *Time Must Have a Stop*. /

Aldous Huxley has only recently reached his fiftieth year, and it is too early to make more than a tentative judgment of his work. If we attempt to compare him with the great novelists of the English tradition, with Fielding, Dickens, Thackeray and Meredith, we have to bear in mind that he, unlike them, has been born in a period in which the fabric of world civilization has been disintegrating, in which traditional spiritual values as well as traditional social institutions have been crumbling. I doubt whether future ages will find any better contemporary interpreter of the mind and the problems of the modern world than Huxley. From this point of view the complexity, the fluidity of his mind have been an enormous asset. They have made him a preternaturally sensitive medium for impressions from every field of knowledge and experience. He has been equipped with the soul of the poet as well as the mind of the scientist. His susceptibility to different modes of experience prevented him from becoming prematurely a dogmatist. The brilliance of his intellect and his limitless curiosity have afforded him an encyclopædic knowledge which neglected no important field of investigation. It may well be true, then, that his interpretation of the modern world goes nearer to the heart of the matter than that of any of his contemporaries.

His picture of life has been criticised for its unpleasantness. The question arises whether a more pleasant picture would have been as true. Perhaps, indeed, in seeking to avoid the characteristic English vice of sentimentality, Huxley has gone to the opposite extreme. The typical English novelist of the great tradition presents us with a host of simple, lovable, kind-hearted people; it is one side of the picture of which the other is our British distrust of intelligence. (Aldous Huxley is supremely intelligent; he is too intelligent to believe that we shall solve our problems by mere goodness of heart.)

Some of the unpleasantness in Huxley is indeed due to the fact that he himself, in the earlier part of his career more particularly, suffered from the characteristic defect of his generation, the split

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mind. Nor do Huxley's latest novels, in spite of his efforts to achieve personal integration through the Spirit, give the impression of a man who has achieved wholeness. In so recent a novel as *After Many a Summer* Huxley cannot refrain, while despising the sensuality of his creations, from continually stimulating the sensual nerve.

Huxley's novels bear considerable resemblance to Bernard Shaw's plays. Perhaps the outstanding effect of both is to afford an intense intellectual stimulus. Huxley writes the novel of ideas as Shaw writes the drama of ideas. Both writers have shown a mastery of wit and anti-climax. If Shaw has been more conspicuous for his verve and eloquence and Huxley for his clarity and scepticism, the explanation is partly that Huxley has been nearer to the supreme crisis of our time.

Huxley's political defeatism is open to the criticism that it tends to discourage worth-while political effort. Also Huxley's thought is probably not without an element of confusion where it impinges on the political sphere.

Politics is the study of the possible and can never be based on pursuing the highest ideal only. The political thinker must perforce select from the policies which are practicable. (Policies based on the assumption that the masses of mankind have reached a high level of spiritual enlightenment, or are capable of a heroic and self-sacrificing pacifism, must be ruled out of court.) Huxley, of course, now realises this. But it remains true that the difference between the best and the worst of the attainable policies is often immense. In losing faith in all policies but that derived from a contemplation of God, Huxley has ceased to feel it worth while to advocate the best of the attainable policies.)

His defeatism does not prove him to be wrong. Perhaps in the objective conditions of our time even the best of the attainable policies must entail disaster. Perhaps a policy based on building on surer foundations after the inevitable collapse of our civilization is sound and realistic. Perhaps it is animal faith rather than an objectively valid analysis of our situation that inspires the best political endeavour of our day. Only time can give a decision on this issue. Time also will inevitably create new developments in Huxley's own views and work, for he is still a relatively young man and a man whose spiritual sensitiveness and intellectual vigour are unimpaired. ✓

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# Graham Greene



WALTER ALLEN

THE virtue and health of a literature lie in its variety, and arranging authors in gradations of merit, compiling lists like football league tables, is a futile and melancholy pursuit. Yet it would be generally agreed, I think, by his fellow writers that Graham Greene is the leading English male novelist of his generation, and the purpose of this essay is to attempt to isolate and examine certain aspects of his art. Of these the first and most important is his deep-rooted and profound awareness of evil, which is unique among contemporary novelists in this country.

Broadly, it seems that there are two possible attitudes towards evil. For want of better names, I shall call these attitudes—which are generally more than attitudes, are predispositions of character rooted in the deepest recesses of personality, the emotional bases of belief—Augustinism and Pelagianism, after St. Augustine and the Irish monk Pelagius, who was his contemporary and opponent. They represent contrasted types. Neither finds it easy to understand or sympathize with the other, who is invariably seen as the enemy. To the Augustinian the Pelagian is essentially superficial or so wilfully blind that he refuses to see the human situation as it is at all; while the Pelagian is inclined to dismiss the Augustinian as “pathological,” the adjective recently applied by the Regius Professor of Divinity in Cambridge to the bulk of present-day theology, which is certainly not Pelagian.

For your Augustinian believes that there is something in man inevitably and always thwarting his noblest intentions and his highest ideals, that his nature is essentially shot through with evil. If he is a Christian, he will say with Newman—Greene quotes the words in his epigraph to *The Lawless Roads*—“Either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from His presence. . . . If there be a God, since there is a

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God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity." To what extent discarded, how far implicated, these are questions the answers to which will vary from time to time and place to place; at certain periods, and for many theologians our own is one of them, the discardment and implication appear total, and then you will get a picture of human life in the universe suggesting, in Whitehead's words, "the Manichean doctrine of a wholly evil material world partially rescued by God's arbitrary selection." At its non-Christian, the finest and highest expression of the Augustinian attitude working itself out in human character may be found in Shakespearean tragedy. But for the average non-Christian Augustinian human life will appear as "nasty, brutish, short," and he is likely to be either an authoritarian and a stoic or a fascist and a cynic. An example of this latter type is the French novelist, Céline, with his constant disgusted yet gratifying discovery—it was after all what he set out to find—in his remarkable book, *A Journey to the End of the Night*, that everything, every human activity and manifestation of society, is a racket.

In the past generation Freud has put forward a new variant of Augustinism, with his picture of the human mind as the battleground of the opposed forces of Eros and the death-wish, a "deep fantasy of dualism" of which Rebecca West, in her study of St. Augustine, has written: "Perhaps it is this which causes the pain of history, the wars, the persecutions, the economic systems which put many to the torture of poverty and raise up rich men only to throw them down, the civilizations that search for death as soon as opportunities for fuller life open before them."

St. Augustine has been called the first modern man; yet the Pelagian, one suspects, is the more recent type. If he is a Christian he may pay lip service to some kind of Fall, but he will usually interpret it metaphorically. If he is not a Christian, he will probably believe that man is naturally good, but is perverted by external factors, by society as such if he is an anarchist, by the capitalist system if he is a Marxist, or by the family. In certain extreme instances, as with the Christian Scientists, he may deny the reality of evil altogether. In any case, in his view of human nature the emphasis will be placed on man as a reasonable being who has the power within him to control his own destiny. For him



evil is something incidental to, not inherent in, the nature of man.

It is plain that, confronted with evil on a universal scale, as we see it to-day, the Augustinian is much better equipped to meet it and explain it than is the Pelagian. To the Augustinian it comes as no surprise at all; he can always say "I told you so." In the understanding and assessment of the human situation in such an age of violence as our own the Augustinian, for whom evil is endemic in man's nature, is at a tremendous advantage. How tremendous may be seen if we compare the present age with an age of similar violence, the Elizabethan period and the first half of the seventeenth century. England had its burnings and its martyrdoms, its civil war, yet in comparison with continental Europe was relatively peaceful. But how the Englishman reacted to those years of violence may be seen in the plays of the great Elizabethans. Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Webster, Tourneur, Ford, are horrified but fascinated; yet they can assimilate the violence, the evil, it is part and parcel of their own emotional world; it is what happens to man when the order, natural and supernatural, that curbs him, is broken. It does not surprise them, because the jungle is, as it were, man's natural state.

Faced with similar violence to-day, Greene has succeeded in assimilating it to a greater extent than any other English contemporary novelist; simply because the various brands of liberalism and rationalism held by the great bulk of present-day writers are incapable of assimilating large-scale evil.

And Greene's knowledge of evil is real, experienced along the nerves and in the blood, and until the publication of *The Power and the Glory* more complete, one would have said, than his knowledge of good. He has written of it at length in autobiographical passages in his travel books, *The Lawless Roads* and *Journey Without Maps*. In the former he writes:

"I was, I suppose, thirteen years old, otherwise why should I have been there—in secret—on the dark croquet lawn? I could hear the rabbit moving behind me, munching the grass in his hutch: an immense building rather like Keble College with small windows bounded the lawn. It was the school: from somewhere behind it, from across the quad, came a faint sound of music: Saturday night, the school orchestra was playing Mendelssohn: I was alone in mournful happiness in the dark."

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"Two countries just here lay side by side . . . you had to step carefully : the border was close beside your gravel path. From my mother's bedroom window . . . you looked straight down into the quad, where the hall and the chapel and the classrooms stood. If you pushed open a green baize door in a passage by my father's study, you entered another passage deceptively similar, but none the less you were on alien ground. There would be a slight smell of iodine from the matron's room : of damp towels from the changing rooms . of ink everywhere. Shut the door behind you again, and the world smelt differently : books and fruit and eau-de-Cologne.

"One was an inhabitant of both countries : on Saturday and Sunday afternoons of one side of the baize door, the rest of the week of the other. How can life on a border be other than restless ? You are pulled by different ties of love and hate. For hate is quite as powerful a tie : it demands allegiance. In the land of skyscrapers, of stone stairs and cracked bells ringing early, one was aware of fear and hate, a kind of lawlessness—appalling cruelties could be practised without a second thought : one met for the first time characters, adult and adolescent, who bore about them the genuine quality of evil. There was Collifax, who practised torments with dividers, Mr. Cranden with pale bleached hair, a dusty gown, a kind of demoniac sensuality : from these heights evil declined towards Parlow whose desk was filled with minute photographs—advertisements for art photos. Hell lay about them in their infancy.

"There lay the horror and the fascination. One escaped surreptitiously for an hour at a time : unknown to frontier guards one stood on the wrong side of the border looking back—one should have been listening to Mendelssohn, but instead one heard the rabbit restlessly cropping near the croquet hoops. It was an hour of release—and also an hour of prayer. One became aware of God with an intensity—time hung suspended—music lay on the air : anything might happen before it became necessary to join the crowd across the border. There was no inevitability anywhere . . . faith was almost great enough to move mountains . . . the great buildings rocked in the darkness.

"And so faith came to one—shapelessly, without dogma, a presence above a croquet lawn, something associated with violence, cruelty, evil across the way. One began to believe in

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heaven because one believed in hell, but for a long while it was hell only one could picture with a certain intimacy."

Later, Greene joined the Roman Catholic Church. But it is this vision of life as something lived on the border, of man as an inhabitant of two countries, to which he has remained faithful, and with each successive novel the expression of the vision has gained in clarity and precision.

In 1935 Greene went to Liberia, walking from Sierra Leone through hinterland of forests to the coast. He has described his experiences in *Journey Without Maps*. It was a return, deliberate, to the sharp experience of terror known in childhood at Berkhamsted. "There seemed," he writes, "to be a seediness about the place you couldn't get to the same extent elsewhere, and seediness has a very deep appeal - even the seediness of civilization, of the sky-signs of Leicester Square, the 'taits' in Bond Street, the smell of cooking greens off Tottenham Court Road, the little tight-waisted Jews in the Strand. It seemed to satisfy, temporarily, the sense of nostalgia for something lost; it seemed to represent a stage further back. . . . There are others, of course, who prefer to look a stage ahead, for whom *Intourist* provides cheap tickets into a plausible future, but my journey represented a distrust of any future based on what we are." Again, in the same book: "To-day our world seems peculiarly susceptible to brutality. There is a touch of nostalgia in the pleasure we take in gangster novels, in characters who have so agreeably simplified their emotions that they have begun living again at a stage below the cerebral. We, like Wordsworth, are living after a world war and a revolution, and these half-castes fighting with bombs between the cliffs of sky-scrapers seem more likely than we to be aware of Proteus rising from the sea. It is not, of course, that one wishes to stay for ever at that level, but when one sees to what unhappiness, to what peril of extinction, centuries of cerebration have brought us, one sometimes has a curiosity to discover if one can from what we have come, to recall at which point we went astray."

Reading this remarkable travel book, which so often seems like a work of symbolism, the record of a journey into the Collective Unconscious, one is reminded again and again of D. H. Lawrence, with his similar awareness of the corruptness of modern man, his continual cry, "We must go back." But, for all

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the similarity, there is a profound difference. Lawrence abjured western civilization, in the end he would have no truck with it ; while for Greene "seediness has a very deep appeal" and hate is a powerful tie, demanding allegiance. Seedy is Greene's favourite adjective, and for the most part the world of his novels is the seedy world of modern economic man at his most urbanised and atomised, a world in which the sense of community has been lost, that world whose values were admirably and horrifying, though no doubt unconsciously and without irony, summed up in the House of Commons by the woman member who referred to babies as "embryo workers." It is, perhaps, the characteristic world of contemporary literature. Eliot has celebrated it in a dozen poems. For its inhabitants life has all but lost its meaning, they drift purposelessly through it little better than automata, behaviouristic puppets salivating in reaction to a few external stimuli :

"Birth copulation and death

That's all the facts when you come to brass tacks

Birth copulation and death. . . ."

It is the only real international world : English novelists who have explored it include such different writers as Evelyn Waugh, William Plomer, in *The Case is Altered* and *The Invaders*, and Patrick Hamilton, in *Hangover Square* ; in France it has been mapped extensively by Céline and Simonon ; in America by Scott Fitzgerald and John O'Hara at the millionaire level and by James T. Farrell at the lower middleclass level, while Traven has charted its slums.

Greene's is the same world. But something has been added ; and it is this something, I believe, that constitutes his uniqueness in contemporary fiction. "Two countries just here lay side by side. . . . One was an inhabitant of both countries. . . . How can life on the border be other than restless ?" More than once Greene quotes Marlowe's line, "Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it." But "one began to believe in heaven because one believes in hell." In his novels Greene remains an inhabitant of both countries : the seedy world is not the only world. And this sense of the two co-existent worlds gives to his picture of the contemporary scene an additional dimension lacking in the pictures of most of his fellow novelists.

Remember, for instance, Farrell's terrifying study of lower

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middle-class life in Chicago, *Studs Lonigan*, a representation of the meaninglessness of existence as lived by young Lonigan, whose aim, the pattern of behaviour to which he seeks to conform, is to be tough, to be feared and respected as a tough guy. The only values he knows are those of the pulp magazine and the gangster film: ruthless, swaggering brutality and easy success with girls. His life is a series of fantasies on these themes, except on the crudest biological planes, being beaten up in brothels and passing out on bootleg booze, he cannot be said to live at all. And these values betray him again and again, because Studs never achieves toughness. He is lost, in every sense helpless from the beginning. Farrell, who is a Marxist, is entirely objective, remains outside the picture. As a Marxist, he himself is presumably not without hope; but hope does not enter the canvas. It is a study of hell without promise of heaven. It competes with Céline's *A Journey to the End of the Night* as the most depressing novel of our time.

And one protests against it; rightly, I think, because one is aware that *Studs Lonigan* is not a complete expression. That Céline's novel is a complete expression of its author, I do not doubt, and on the evidence of the book Céline is only logical when, as now, he makes his fascist sympathies evident. But Farrell is a Marxist and, from his book, *A Note on Literary Criticism*, an extremely sensitive critic. Yet neither his political belief in the possibility of a decent way of life nor his personal sensitivity and culture find place in *Studs Lonigan*; and because so many qualities that we all recognise as existing have been left out of the book, the picture it presents is partial; true, but not the whole truth. It is as though evil were something outside Farrell; hell fascinates him, but he himself is outside it; and visiting hell, wandering round Halstead Street and Chicago East Side, Farrell is doing something very much like slumming. It is, in a way, the result of a too personally complacent attitude: it is always the other chap, not oneself, who is damned. It represents a failure, ultimately, to integrate one's knowledge of evil with one's vision of good.

This vision of human life as the point of intersection of heaven and hell Greene has pursued through a series of novels with increasing single-mindedness. In doing so he has taken in his stride more aspects of the contemporary European scene than most novelists; he has the good journalist's flair for the topical

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subject. (Here I should perhaps point out that he divides his fiction into two kinds, novels proper and "entertainments," but just as the little girl wrote of Shakespeare that his comedies were as good as tragedies by anybody else, so Greene's "entertainments" are at least as good as most people's novels.) To this presentation of the contemporary scene he has brought a swift, nervous, almost kaleidoscopic style and a technique of montage which owes much to the film. He has been criticized because his novels tend to have the same formula, that of the hunted man. This does not seem to me to be serious: the hunted man is one of the oldest symbolic figures, and even in the entertainments one is never far from symbolism. Moreover, the working out of the formula has been varied with each book and has enabled him always—and this is not too common in modern fiction—to tell a story that is exciting in its own right as a story.

Particularly interesting, in the light of his later work, is his first novel, *The Man Within*. The period of the book is the eighteenth century, and the central character, a young smuggler, tormented by feelings of inferiority, betrays his fellow smugglers to the excisemen. He is conscious, in rather more clear-cut terms than is usual in the later books, of his double nature, of a higher and lower self, if you like. Fleeing his former comrades, he is sheltered by a girl with whom he falls in love and who persuades him to go to Lewes, give himself up and go into the witness-box for the Crown. He does so, though he knows his old associates will certainly try to kill him. He goes into the witness-box; but by then his motives for doing so are mixed: he is doing it for love of the girl, but he would not have brought himself to the pitch of doing it if he had not been seduced by the mistress of the lawyer leading for the prosecution.

This preoccupation with betrayal, whether of a man by himself or of one man by another, together with its opposite quality of loyalty, runs through Greene's earlier novels. In *It's a Battlefield*, for instance, Conrad Drover, the brother of a Communist bus-driver sentenced to death for killing a policeman during a political riot, betrays himself and his chances of happiness by sleeping with his brother's wife; while opposed to him is the figure of the Police Commissioner whom he attempts to shoot, the embodiment almost of the abstract idea of loyalty, a soldier concerned not with justice, but with duty. In *A Gun for Sale*

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there is the hare-lipped killer, who against his judgment trusts a girl and is betrayed by her ; and set against him the girl's fiancé, Mathers, the detective, who " was part of an organization. He did not want to be a leader, he did not even want to give himself up to some God-sent fanatic of a leader, he liked to think he was one of thousands more or less equal working for a concrete end ; not equality of opportunity, not government by the people or by the richest or by the best ; but simply to do away with crime which meant uncertainty." Or again, there is D., in *The Confidential Agent*, the university professor who is the emissary of a government fighting a civil war, come to England on a secret mission to buy coal, hunted through London by his enemies and knowing that his most probable end is that he will face a firing squad of his own side. As a final instance, on a lower plane, there is Minty in *England Made Me*, the shabby Old Harrovian penny-a-liner, organizing old boys' dinners in Stockholm.

In this insistence on loyalty, of trust in a world of broken trust, Greene has obvious affinities with Conrad.

The actions of these early novels are played out against a whole series of international backgrounds ; fear of Communism, in *It's a Battlefield* ; the threat of imminent war caused by the assassination, by a killer in the pay of armament manufacturers, of a Central European statesman, in *A Gun for Sale* ; the fall of a Kreuger-like Swedish industrialist, in *England Made Me* ; the Orient Express, in *Stamboul Train* ; the struggle to buy coal by rival agents of a country engaged in civil war in *The Confidential Agent*. Each of these novels is the microcosm of the violence of a continent. And, with their violence, their lonely embodiments of loyalty, the obsession with betrayal, the crisscross of intrigue, the fugitives and the chase, they are reminiscent in a very real way of the world of the old Icelandic sagas and eddas. " Though he believe it, no man is strong."

Nevertheless, brilliant as these novels are, there is a very considerable difference in achievement between them and the more recent novels, *Brighton Rock* and *The Power and the Glory*. For while the characterization in the earlier novels is often excellent and always adequate, the characters are essentially minor characters. While they appear they have the vividness, the individuality of the minor characters in the best French films, of *Quai des Brumes*, for instance, or *Hotel du Nord* ; they convince ; some

indeed are unforgettable—Acky, the old unfrocked clergyman in *A Gun for Sale*, and his aged, slatternly bawd of a wife ; or Minty in *England Made Me* ; but exigencies of plot do not allow of their development.

But there is a more essential difference between the earlier and the later novels. The formula—that of the hunted man—remains the same, but now the action takes place *sub specie aeternitatis*, as it were. The chase is no longer, at any rate only superficially, that of policemen hunting killers or of rival political agents. Pursuer and pursued now exist each in a separate universe of belief. The hunt itself has become the point of intersection of the secular world and secular values with non-secular allegiances. For example, in *Brighton Rock*, in many ways Greene's most ambitious novel, the contrast is between the ideas, on the one hand, of good and evil in their exalted sense, as making for eternal salvation or damnation, and, on the other, of the purely secular ideas of right and wrong. *Brighton Rock* is Dostoevskyan in conception and is not Dostoevskyan at second or third remove, as are Gide's novels. When Pinkie, the boy gangster, commits murder, when he plans to blind his girl with vitriol, he is not indulging in an *acte gratuite* : he is deliberately and consciously *choosing* damnation instead of salvation. Hell lay about him in his infancy and, adolescent, of his own free will he opts for hell. In a very real sense his pursuer, the jolly, hearty Ida, the epitome of vulgar good times, of good-natured copulation that has about the same significance as a blow-out on Guinness and oysters, Ida, whose friend he has murdered and who knows what's right, likes to see fair play and believes in justice, cannot touch him, though she can drive him on into a series of desperate attempts to cover his tracks which culminate in his killing himself. They do not speak the same language. He is, terrifyingly, out of her reach, because his allegiance is to a wholly different set of values ; just as the girl Rose, who loves him and, a good Catholic, voluntarily accepts mortal sin to save him, is also out of her reach.

Such, then, is the theme of *Brighton Rock*, played out against a background of Brighton and Peacchaven, a setting of boozy good times, in terms of murder and clashes between rival race gangs ; plainly the most serious theme that any Christian novelist can treat. Is the book successful ? Not, I think, entirely ; but not for the reason put forward by the *Evening Standard's* reviewer



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when the novel first appeared : Mr. Howard Spring, it may be remembered, did not see any difference between good and evil on the one hand and right and wrong on the other. The difficulty lies, I believe, in the character of the boy Pinkie ; and the difficulty is not one of accepting, but of understanding. In the presence of Pinkie one is in the presence of that order of precocity which in history was Chatterton's and Rimbaud's, and it cannot be said that the years since their death have thrown much light on Chatterton and Rimbaud.

But there can be no doubt of the success of *The Power and the Glory*, in which the theme is not damnation, but salvation, salvation, moreover, of what at first sight appears very unpromising material. The action takes place in a Mexican state in which the Church is under the ban of the law and priests are regarded as the most dangerous criminals. The one priest who remains in the state is a bad priest, a "whusky" priest ; a coward, the father of a child, unable to exist without brandy ; a disgrace, in other words, to the priesthood, an object of contempt. Yet, in spite of himself, in spite even of his own will, he goes on exercising his vocation, sheltered and protected by the Indians. He achieves before our eyes, the pathetic, shabby, all-too-human priest, a degree of goodness and heroism of which he is quite unconscious. Himself, he is aware only of failure. So, in his cell on the morning of his execution :

"When he woke up it was dawn. He woke with a huge feeling of hope which suddenly and completely left him at the first sight of the prison yard. It was the morning of his death. He crouched on the floor with the empty brandy-flask in his hand trying to remember an Act of Contrition. 'O God, I am sorry and beg pardon for all my sins . . . crucified . . . worthy of Thy dreadful punishments.' He was confused, his mind was on other things : it was not the good death for which one always prayed. He caught sight of his own shadow on the cell wall : it had a look of surprise and grotesque unimportance. What a fool he had been to think that he was strong enough to stay when others fled. What an impossible fellow I am, he thought, and how useless. I have done nothing for anybody. I might just as well have never lived. His parents were dead—soon he wouldn't even be a memory—perhaps after all he wasn't really Hell-worthy. Tears poured down his face : he was not at the moment afraid of

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damnation—even the fear of pain was in the background. He felt only an immense disappointment because he had to go to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all. It seemed to him, at that moment, that it would have been quite easy to have been a saint. It would only have needed a little self-restraint and a little courage. He felt like someone who has missed happiness by seconds at an appointed place. He knew now that at the end there was only one thing that counted—to be a saint.”

Against him is set the figure of his pursuer, the police lieutenant, the apostle of a socialist totalitarianism. The priest is trapped; or rather, walks knowingly into a trap because he cannot refuse to administer the last sacrament to a dying gangster. The peak of the book is the confrontation of the priest by the police lieutenant; the protagonists of opposed orders, each a representative of his own kind of loyalty, meet each other; the lieutenant with his: “Well, we have ideas, too . . . No more money for saying prayers, no more money for building places to say prayers in. We’ll give people food instead, teach them to read, give them books. We’ll see they don’t suffer”; and the priest with his: “It’s no good your working for your end unless you’re a good man yourself. And there won’t always be good men in your party. Then you’ll have the old starvation, beating, get-rich-anyhow. But it doesn’t matter so much my being a coward—and all the rest. I can put God into a man’s mouth just the same—and I can give him God’s pardon. It wouldn’t make any difference to that if every priest in the church was like me”; and again: “Why do you think I tell people out of the pulpit that they’re in danger of damnation if death catches them unawares? I’m not telling them fairy stories I don’t believe myself. I don’t know a thing about the mercy of God: I don’t know how awful the human heart looks to him. But I do know this—that if there’s ever been a single man in this state damned, then I’ll be damned too . . . I wouldn’t want it to be any different. I just want justice, that’s all.”

What is important to note is that *The Power and the Glory* transcends its ostensible theme of the struggle between the Catholic Church and the particular brand of secularism established in Mexico. It was published in 1940, but re-reading it to-day one realises that it takes on a universal meaning; here, set in a remote state of Central America, is expressed with a poet’s

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imagination a vision of the universal struggle, the struggle that is being fought at all times and which to-day is being waged conspicuously by clergymen and school teachers in Norway against the Gestapo, by the Jews of Warsaw, by Greek guerrillas and French saboteurs, wherever, in fact, men are prepared to fight for their own conception of the good life against brute power. It is the completer vision because it is consciously unheroic, because the human goodness of the priest is seen as inextricably interwoven with his many base qualities. In other words, human goodness and evil are seen as integral.

Since writing *The Power and the Glory*, apart from a short study of the English dramatists, Greene has written only *The Ministry of Fear*, an entertainment, that is to say, a thriller. But here again, a thriller with a profound difference, for the hero is a man who has poisoned his wife out of pity because she was dying in great pain, and, quite apart from the enemy agents who pursue him through the book, is pursued by feelings of terror and remorse for the crime he has committed.

Greene is now about forty. He is already the finest novelist of his generation. When one looks at the progress he has made in the past fifteen years, at his enormous resources of technique, his mastery of his art and, in particular, how he has widened his scope as to include the greatest problems that face men on this earth, one cannot help but believe that the years to come will show him to be not only the leading novelist of a generation, but also one of the great English novelists.

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# André Gide



WALLACE FOWLIE

## I

THE multiple aspects of André Gide's sensitivity and intelligence have been countless times enumerated and analysed. His restlessness, his endless quest and curiosity have led him through philosophies, experiences, and genres until his very extensive work stands out to-day as the major source for our contemporary æsthetic and moral problems. He has been publishing continuously for fifty-three years. But during this period, between 1891, when his first book, *Les Cahiers d'André Walter*, appeared, and 1944, when his *Journal*, 1939-1942 was published in New York, Gide has maintained, despite the diversity of his thought, a central role of extraordinary unity. In fact, no other role could represent such oneness of purpose and attitude, because it is that of Narcissus.

Gide no longer appears to us as the diversifier or the wearer of many masks. Both contemplator and contemplative, he is the man of our age who has looked most religiously and most lovingly at himself and at the mirrored features of the universe. Great books, those of our age and of other ages, renew the myths of mankind. Those of Gide renew the myth of Narcissus, of that being who questions himself by means of his sight and the steady searching of his eyes. To know the form of his very soul was the objective of the youth who bent down over the waters of the fountain and excluded from his sight and from his passion all that was not he himself.

We are familiar with the story of the myth, but we are usually unaware of its resurgence among us. We remember Narcissus as that youth for whom a kiss was impossible because the lips he desired were his own. He was the boy held not by the world, but by the appearance of the world as it outlined itself in the colourless water. Centred in this mirrored appearance of the

world was his own form with which Narcissus strove to unite himself. Here the Greek myth reveals the universal quest of man: union with one's first self, union with reality and the pure part of one's created being.

As one book has succeeded another, the written words of Gide have become increasingly transparent and revelatory. His books are like crystal works of art, like the mirror-fountain of Narcissus, that catch partial reflections of the world and of himself. The steady gaze of Narcissus into the clear water is the myth of man, whereas the works of the artist are the sacrifice he makes to the world, of himself and of his self-contemplation. In each book Gide tries to recompose his features. Each book is a forcing of himself toward that form which has been lost in the universe. They are a series of mirrors, whose beauty lies not so much in the reflected traits as in the seriousness of the contemplation and the fervent search to unite with the original self.

At the very inception of his career, Gide wrote a brief tract on Narcissus (*Traité du Narcisse*). It was published in the same year that his first book appeared. To-day, in the perspective of many years, the interpretation of Narcissus seems more centrally relevant to Gide's work than his *André Walter*. The influence of Mallarmé and the symbolists is strong in both of these early pieces. Sterility and hamletism characterize Gide's first hero, André Walter, in his incapacity to meet life with action or equate his dream with reality. But in his statement on the problems of Narcissus, Gide alters the symbolist pose of immobility enacted by Baudelaire's albatross and Mallarmé's swan. The sailors who have unprisoned the albatross on the deck of the boat, and the lake which has frozen over the white wings of the swan, are symbols of the world opposing the necessary freedom of the artist's spirit. But the attraction which Narcissus feels in the calm water of the fountain has not been imposed upon him by any outside force. He is free in his self-love and wills this strange solitary contemplation. There is a vast difference between the detrimental weight of the world making impossible any soaring of the spirit and the long gaze of his eyes which Narcissus directs downward to the tranquil waters of a fountain. In each pose—in the incarcerated pose of the symbolist and in the self-willed and hypnotic pose of Narcissus—the artist is alone. But the reason for the pose is different in each case.

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The experience of the romantic or the symbolist seeking to release himself from the bonds of society and the material world is less metaphysical than the experience of Narcissus seeking to attach himself to the profoundest part of his own being. The symbolist seeks release in order to create a new part of himself in a new freedom. Narcissus seeks attachment in order to discover the oldest and most permanent part of himself. One moves toward an unconceived form; the other toward a lost form. Narcissus is therefore religious in his striving to unite with what he feels to be a lost primitive reality, and the symbolist is still romantic in his striving to be what is unreal and imaginary.

Through his renewal of the Narcissus myth, André Gide has separated himself from the romantic trend which, more than any other, has characterized Western literature of the past 150 years. After his initial treatment of the subject in 1891, he has continued to recast the same problem in all of his major books. Not consciously has Gide recreated the myth in his writings. But the problem of Narcissus is Gide's, and the fervour of its application is religious.

## II

The first important book of André Gide, *Les Nourritures Terrestres*, was published in 1897, but was not read until several years later. This work is a song of love, and especially a song on the thirst of love. Like Narcissus, the singer in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* is contemplating water in the desert of his desire, or that source which might satisfy his thirst.

Echo and the other nymphs who are abandoned by Narcissus are, in the personal experience of Gide, his early puritanism and timidity, Europe, and the life of intellection. Africa is both oasis and desert, both fertility and thirst, where the new Narcissus can forget much of his early heritage and lose himself in a new search for his being.

*Les Nourritures Terrestres* is the second major attack in French letters on the nineteenth century and on the exaggerated roles of science, bourgeoisism, and of the nation. The first attack was written in the century itself, in 1873, by a boy of nineteen, Arthur Rimbaud. *Une Saison en Enfer* announces a flight to Africa, where by joining the race of the negroes, Rimbaud might plunge into a pre-Christian period and forget the morality

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imposed upon him by his Catholic baptism and the bourgeois conventions of his age. Unlike Gide, Rimbaud was the artist of violence. He renewed, in his flights of self-annihilation, another myth, fully as ancient as that of Narcissus, in the history of man: the myth of the phoenix. The work of Rimbaud is a self-immolation. He had to destroy himself utterly in order to rise up again from his own ashes.

These two works are songs of love. Rimbaud's relates the love of violence and self-destruction, and Gide's relates the love of contemplation and of self. Rimbaud, in *Une Saison en Enfer*, portrays himself as the hyena, the convict, and the sinner who, Samson-like, causes to crash down upon his own head the world he despised and refused to obey. Gide, in *Les Nourritures Terrestres*, portrays himself as the sensualist who knows the universe through his senses, who feels directly the touch of the earth, of plants, the taste of wine, the longing of thirst and desire, the art of nights and dawns, the ecstasy of sleep. Rimbaud, in his phoenix reincarnation, denounced his century by destroying the artist in himself and by resurrecting himself in Ethiopia as a gun-runner for King Menelok. Gide, in his Narcissus reincarnation, denounced the same century by wilfully creating, from a background of bourgeois Calvinism, the artist in himself. The sands, the oasis springs, and the suppleness of young Arabs which he contemplated in North Africa were the reflections of himself, of the self he willed to become, of that part of him most distant from the earlier Paris self.

He tells us explicitly in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* that the characters he names never existed. Ménalque, who seems to be the teacher of this new fervour, and Nathanaël, who is the disciple being taught, are the two roles of Narcissus: the one who looks and the one who is seen. No characters in the book, and yet it is a book on love. The central dogma in this new religion of love is that of vision. Gide tells us countless times that the act of seeing is more significant than the thing seen. It is the desire which counts and enriches the soul, and not the possession of the thing desired.

This is perhaps the fullest definition we can give of the Gidian term "fervour." Fervour seems to imply an attainment to the bareness of being, to the first elemental part of a man, and also to the fullness of emotion, to the amplitude which precedes any



satisfaction or collapse of emotion. Two words, "attentes" and "fièvre," recur so persistently throughout the text of Gide that they can be taken as synonyms of his fervour in which one being is all beings. To wait, in a state of fever, describes the love of Narcissus. Nathanael is the soul of Gide to which he speaks in his desert thirst and love, as the fountain is the reflection of Narcissus into which he directs his gaze.

Gide's own soul is his first and his last disciple. When he refers to an imaginary disciple, he relates his efforts to lead the disciple away from all things dissimilar to him: his family, his room, his books, his past. This same kind of seduction was related by Lautréamont and by Rimbaud. With Gide it is less violent because he has the tenderness of Narcissus who fears to breathe lest the surface of the water be troubled. Narcissus learns to judge his own being by its ability to receive light, and Gide judges all beings thus. The extreme degree of luminous receptivity is the measure of love any being is capable of. Light refracted from his face is the joy of Narcissus.

No one exists in *Les Nourritures Terrestres*. Even Gide himself is just Vision. (*Et même moi, je n'y suis rien que Vision.* p. 151.). And Narcissus also changes his being into vision. That is why in the ancient myth and in its modern version of *Les Nourritures Terrestres* there is no place for the theme of solitude. Because there is no experience of solitude in the usual romantic sense. To be alone *in* oneself, in the deepest part of oneself, is vastly different from being alone *with* oneself. When Narcissus is alone in himself, he ceases being a single person. *Je suis peuplé*, writes Gide (p. 177) when he becomes aware of the multiple selves of his being. Hidden and moving within him are all men, all races, and all moments. The hypnotized quiet of Narcissus is necessary for Gide to feel inhabited.

The pose of Gide in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* is absence from the world. Yet all the world is present in him. He is not alone in his absence, because his solitary existence has become quietly and fervently all existence. Narcissus of the myth thus becomes the artist reincarnated in our age, to an extraordinarily pure degree, by André Gide. The love expressed in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* is the love of the artist: prepared and protracted and fortified by a very special kind of vision of the world. Little wonder that young men, gifted in the art of creative work and

thought, have been moved and tormented by this book. It is about their problem which is a new kind of love evolved by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The modern artist has become Narcissus, and *Les Nourritures Terrestres* is his epithalamium. It is a marriage song celebrating the union of the artist with the world. But the union is consummated by vision and not by participation. The artist is the man who sings of the world without acting in the world. He is chained before the picture of the world, and his sole relationship with it is his dangerous and exquisite power of sight.

The silences of the modern artist are as regular as his speech. When night blots out the picture of the world, his words are interrupted, his work arrested. Between the visible beauty of the world and the hidden depths of the artist's being, a creative relationship exists. But this is broken off and suspended during each period of night when he can no longer see. Narcissus needed the light of the sun, as the modern artist does, in order to pursue his seeing inquest.

As Narcissus is the myth of the love which is generated solely by sight, so *Les Nourritures Terrestres* is the love of the ancient myth regenerated by an ever-deepening self-examination. Each instant brings a newer and more visible awareness of oneself. Each instant is therefore different from all other instants. The unpredictable newness of the coming instant underlies the principle of narcissistic love. Because of it, the past is constantly being destroyed for Narcissus; as for Nathanaël, books, after they are read, are rejected and burned.

The desire for love is more real than love. To love, in the ordinary sense, implies the making of a choice. But Nathanaël has learned that he must choose nothing less than everything. And everything is nothing more than what he sees. God is totally in any one part of His universe. Since God is everywhere, any one being can reveal Him to us. And especially the being which is ourself.

### III

The concept itself of God provides the transition between Gide's first important book, *Les Nourritures Terrestres*, and his second important book, *La Porte Etroite*, published twelve years later, in 1909.

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In between these two books, *L'Immoraliste* appeared in 1902. This "récit" is a narrative version of *Les Nourritures Terrestres*. The protagonist Michel is a combination of Nathanael and his teacher. Michel teaches himself, cures himself, and watches himself throughout the story. His return to health in Africa is equivalent to a new awareness of himself and of deeply hidden desires within his being. He watches the Arab boy Moktir steal a pair of scissors and sees himself liberated from conventional morality. Out of the earlier song of desire and thirst, Gide fashioned in *L'Immoraliste* a circumstantial tale of narcissistic love.

*La Porte Etroite* is the same narcissistic dilemma, but raised to a Christian level. The title itself, "Straight is the gate," of Biblical origin, gives a clue to our interpretation. This narrow door is comparable to a mirror or a fountain or any reduced area on which one has to live by means of an extraordinary concentration of power. Alissa, in this novel, seeks to learn how to pass alone, without Jérôme, through the narrow door, as Narcissus, in the myth, seeks to inhabit his own solitude and pierce in the reflection on the water the continuous vision of himself.

One-fifth of the book is made up of extracts from Alissa's journal. This form of writing, used so consistently by Gide in almost every one of his books, is narcissistic in serving as a steady mirror of one's thoughts and features. The narrative part of the story is both explicated and surpassed by Alissa's journal. There the themes become luminous and poignant because there they are really seen for the first time.

The persuasive quality of narcissism in *La Porte Etroite* is apparent not only in the title and in the journal form of writing, but also in the use of the garden setting, particularly on hot summer evenings, where many of the scenes take place and where the dilemma grows to its highest pitch of intensity. The garden in *La Porte Etroite* is comparable to the desert in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* and to the fountain in *Narcissus*. These three settings really serve as reflections of the same psychological state. They are limited and reduced, because they are needed to contain the form of only one individual, of that unique self which is André Gide.

Finally, to this list of narcissistic traits, to the title, to the

journal, to the garden in *La Porte Etroite*, we can add the close blood relationship of Alissa and Jérôme. The fact that Alissa is Jérôme's cousin makes for a kind of family reflection of himself, another self in whom the same traits are either reduced or enlarged. They experience the same inner feelings, even when they are separated by large distances, as if they were the same person. And Alissa always more intensively than Jérôme, as if she were Narcissus and Jérôme were her reflection.

Even when Alissa and her sister Juliette were children, Jérôme knew that Alissa was the girl he wanted to watch and contemplate, and that her sister was the girl he wanted to play with. At the moment when, as a young boy, he saw Alissa's face covered with tears, he realized that his life vocation had been decided. He knew then that he was destined to watch and wait patiently and ineffectually throughout his life. His sentence, *Moi, je ne te quitterai jamais* (p. 41), is stated at the beginning of a poem on the form of love in which no action takes place.

The roles of Jérôme and Alissa are easily reversible. Gide is in both of them, but more persistently in Alissa. Jérôme waits. He is Narcissus in the physical quietness of his body. But Alissa looks steadily at the thoughts and experiences of Jérôme, and at the garden site of her solitude. (*Ici rien n'est changé dans le jardin*, p. 127). She says that she sees everything through him (*je regarde à travers toi chaque chose*, p. 129), and this she continues to do even more fully and more amorously when Jérôme is travelling. The narcissistic theme becomes most pronounced when Alissa confesses that her love is more perfect when Jérôme is at a great distance from her (*de loin je t'aimais davantage*, p. 156). Her solitude in the garden fashions for Alissa a love, not real, but which seems perfect, and turns her into a solipsist, which appears to be a modern term synonymous with narcissist.

The word "happiness" is often on the lips of Alissa. The meaning she attaches to it is difficult to ascertain, and yet in this meaning lies the key to her dilemma and her desires. We can understand best what happiness is not for Alissa. It is nothing which can be saved or guarded; it is nothing to which she wishes or hopes to attain quickly. It is exactly opposed to the happiness which Emma Bovary desires and believes she can have. Fundamentally, Emma is guided by a bourgeois morality of possession, whereas Alissa is guided by a morality of sacrifice.

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Happiness for Emma depends on an obscure confusion of herself with some other being, and happiness for Alissa seems to depend on an infinite and continuous approach to God. Emma tries to save her life and therefore loses it. Alissa tries to lose her life by avoiding the world and Jérôme and all facile happiness. Constantly she narrows the physical sphere of her world. She eliminates her family, her books, Jérôme, and finally the garden itself. This is the action of Narcissus, of Nathanael in *Les Nourritures Terrestres*, of Michel in *L'Immoraliste*, of the prodigal son in *Le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue* (1907). It is Gide's personal interpretation of renouncement which equates salvation. To save oneself is to renounce everything and attain the ultimate state of unencumberedness which Gide defines as "*disponibilité*."

Her journal is proof enough that Alissa was not happy in her regimen of renouncement. Michel in *L'Immoraliste* represents immoderate avidity, and Alissa in *La Porte Etroite* represents immoderate virtue. Both destroy their lives. Gratuitous ardour on a hedonistic level, as in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* and in *L'Immoraliste*, can become confused with ascetic severity on a puritanical level, as in *La Porte Etroite*. The religious experience in Gide, whether it be Pagan or Protestant, appears always in the form of search. The usual religious experience implies some direct knowledge of God, some awareness of the absolute. But Gide's experience is exclusively a quest. There is vague sadness at the end of Michel's quest, and profound sadness at the end of Alissa's.

For Narcissus, the fate of continuously seeing attaches him to the fountain site of a garden. Alissa appears attached to the same site for the same intent purpose. She sees herself throughout the years grow dim and unlovely. In her the myth of world-renouncement and self-love become the pathos of solipsism. Had she attained to a religious experience, her solitude would have been happiness. When woman is only Narcissus, she sees not her beauty and her principle as the adolescent boy did, but her vanishing beauty and her losing life.

## IV

It was not until 1925, at the age of fifty-six, that Gide published what he called his first novel, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. Thus he

comes to the form of the novel only after using other genres: the "treatise" on *Narcisse*, the dithyrambic utterances of *Les Nourritures Terrestres*, the sober tales of *L'Immoraliste* and *La Porte Etroite*. Mauriac has written that the novel begins where solipsism leaves off. But no single definition of the form is applicable to all novels. Mauriac's definition applies to his own writings, but Gide's novel is largely solipsistic, or, as we prefer to call it, "narcissistic."

The central character Edouard is the novelist, who is Gide, and who is also Narcissus. Edouard both acts in the drama and comments on it. He is therefore both protagonist and chorus. He is both Narcissus and the reflection. Perhaps the analogy with Narcissus is not quite so accurate as it would be with the Neptunian: the single man who is two. But the Neptunian, or the dual character, is a variation of Narcissus.

Edouard the novelist is alone, standing midway between two worlds. On one side of him is the world of the young: inhabited especially by Bernard and Olivier. And on the other side of him is the world of adults: composed especially of parents, of ministers, of teachers. The artist finds himself between the world of the rebels and the uninitiate and the world of the moralists who stand for security and law. He is the man outside of life, who suffers from his apartness from normal living, and yet who, because of this suffering, is able to contemplate life more steadily, more amorously, and more heroically than other men who are daily destroyed by life. Tonio Kröger in Thomas Mann's story admirably states this predicament when he says: "I am sick to death of depicting humanity without having any part or lot in it." Edouard is the artist incapable of any facile kind of happiness in terms of human relationships. In the same way, Alissa stands apart from her sister and from Jérôme. And the singer in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* stands apart from Nathanaël and Ménélaque.

In *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* the Neptunian character of Edouard is involved in all the various dramas of the novel, and yet he remains aloof from them all. The drama closest to him, and therefore the central drama of the work, is his relationship to Bernard and Olivier. Edouard is unable to hold Bernard, but he does hold Olivier. The experience with Olivier, one which would be condemned by society, is transposed and spiritualized in the novel. By this experience Edouard reveals himself a

Neptunian in playing simultaneously the roles of sinner and artist. He is both held by the earth and drawn to heaven. This is no case of schizophrenia, because Edouard remains at all times relentlessly lucid and determined. By being the artist, he wills to attract others different from himself.

The very title of the work, the "counterfeiters," proves that the subject is not schizophrenia but neptunianism. It is a novel about a man who behaves in one way in the eyes of the world, and who all the time is making plans for another behaviour. The artist, the teacher, and the priest, whose vocations demand a fairly fixed pattern of living, are most easily Neptunian. They can lead dual and simultaneous existences of good and evil. They can most easily appear one character and be another. Edouard is one man when he is seen by others in the novel, and another man when he sees himself in his own journal. Good and evil seem to be equal forces in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, and it is with considerable reason that the doctrine of manicheism has been exhumed from its pages. The endless dialogue which Edouard (or Gide) carries on with himself is much more than introspection; it is a dialogue between two different characters who are the same man.

Previous to Gide's work, the novel concerned itself largely with the role of fate, with the conflict between good and evil, with social forces, with the struggle between opposing passions. But it never concerned itself solely with the essence of a single being. This is what Gide tries to do in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. In Edouard's temptation to stay with Olivier, to influence him deliberately, and even to make him his secretary, lies the desire to see his own essence more bare. When at this point in the novel, Edouard decides to avoid the temptation and go to London, it is simply a case of Narcissus becoming Huguenot. He is attempting to know a way more difficult than that of his own nature. *Partir parce que l'on a trop grande envie de rester!* (p. 161.)

In order to mark his break with Olivier at this time, Edouard buys a new notebook for his journal. The new format and the fresh clean pages, which help him to consummate a painful separation and begin a new chapter in his life, are a facile symbol for another fountain over whose waters the same thirst will be renewed. Edouard (or Gide) always remains the artist who

lives by his thirst, and never becomes the protagonist who is defeated by passion or by events in a tragedy or in a novel.

This explains the final sentence of the book: *Je suis bien curieux de connaître Caloub*. There is no end or even climax to the narcissistic pose of Edouard. Events and dramas and sentiments affect him deeply, but they only interrupt momentarily the mirroring of himself in the universe and in the faces of those around him. The last pages of the novel relate the tragic suicide of the boy Boris in his classroom. The pistol shot which kills him is like a stone being thrown into the fountain. For a moment the reflection is shattered. Edouard can no longer see himself in the unpredictable death of a schoolboy. But gradually the waters resume their evenness and the gaze returns. There was not sufficient motivation in this suicide to satisfy the novelist and the analyst Edouard. He refuses to incorporate it in his *Faux-Monnayeurs* and his gaze continues to be directed toward that part of the universe which he can still fathom, and which is himself, so different from an ill-considered and brutal suicide. Like Narcissus, Gide is not concerned with progress in morality, but with something which is at once more particularized and more universalized than morality: with progress in man's sincerity.

In 1935, Gide published *Les Nouvelles Nourritures*, which is a recast of *Les Nourritures Terrestres* following an interlude of thirty-eight years. The style is more sober and chaste than that of the earlier book. Gide now seems more intent on formulating conclusions about sensory experience than on describing the experience itself. Yet underneath these more meditative and even philosophical passages continue the same fervent quest and excitement, the same *frémissement*, the same eager self-examination. And there seems to be a larger number of narcissistic images. Gide talks about the white page of his notebook as something which shines in front of him (*la page blanche luit devant moi*, p. 20); he describes his pose of bending down and looking beyond the present (*je me penche par-delà le présent* p. 21); he has learned to realize from the "moment" the quietness of "eternity" (*je sais à présent goûter la quiétude éternité dans l'instant*, p. 27). These are all exercises of Narcissus on his absorption with the universe.

Especially, in *Les Nouvelles Nourritures*, the innumerable sen-



tences on the concept of God reveal the use to which Gide has made of the term and his increasing personal enlightenment about what the name of God has meant to him in the past. We remember the opening sentence in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* of 1897: *Ne souhaitez pas, Nathanaël, trouver Dieu ailleurs que partout.* "Do not hope to find God elsewhere than everywhere.") In the new pages of 1935, God is described as being diffused throughout His creation, both hidden and lost in it, continually discovering Himself in it, to the point of confusing Himself with His own creation (*cf.* p. 76). The meaning which Gide might have attached to the concept of God during his lifetime has always been obscured by the facility and the frequency with which he uses the term. The meaning of God has always been replaced by the poetic invocation to the word "God." All the concepts in Gide's mind which are the most vaguely outlined and the most difficult to comprehend—namely, all those concepts which he enjoys the most—have been poured into the general concept of God as if it were a vase of endlessly changing proportions capable of contraction or expansion. The word "God" has been synonymous for Gide with all kinds of notions and sentiments, of questions and answers. It is the word reflecting all other words which has become "gidian" in its diversity and constancy. In the *Traité du Narcisse* it was "contemplation"; in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* it was "fervour"; in *La Porte Etroite* it was "renouncement"; in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* it was "detachment." These four words, when given a religious connotation, designate the attitude of Narcissus in the profoundest meaning of his self-exploration. The confusions of Gide can never be solved as long as he remains Narcissus. He is looking not at God but at himself, and not even at himself but at a reflection of himself.

The parables which recur the most continuously in the writings of Gide substantiate two of his cardinal beliefs: (1) that a single individual is more interesting than all men; (2) that the only valid adventure for an individual is that one which is most dangerous for him to undertake. This is the meaning Gide attaches to the stories of the lost sheep and the prodigal son, and to the verse: "Whosoever loseth his life shall save it." These three lessons from the Gospels could easily be construed as Christian interpretations of the Narcissus myth. Each one

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seems to be built around the doctrinal admonition to leave the familiar world in order to engage oneself with the unknown.

In calling nature God, Gide joins himself with the great romantics, and especially with Rousseau who sought to merge himself with unfathomed and chaotic nature. Romanticism is the major protest man has made against civilization and against reason. The romantic tries first to establish his uniqueness (Narcissus, the dandy, the artist), and then to experience a quasi-mystical union with nature. But by calling nature God, the romantic does not thereby convert nature into God. The romantic union is one between man and the chaos of nature and sentiment. Gide, as we tried to point out at the beginning of this study, is the most recent of the romantic artists and one who subsumes and even transcends the movement by the extraordinary fervour he brings to the role of Narcissus. He tracks down his being, arrests all his movements, and then from the deepest part of his spirit conjures up a mythical past.

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# James Joyce

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STUART GILBERT

THOUGH few things are riskier than literary forecast, one may predict that a student of letters several generations hence—in, say, the last decade of the twenty-first century—if asked to name the most significant and influential writer of the first half of the preceding century, will promptly answer, “Joyce.” But, if required by the examiner to “state his reasons,” he will probably give an answer somewhat different from that which Joyce’s contemporaries gave in the decades following the appearance of what ranks, for the majority, as his masterpiece: *Ulysses*. Not only for the common reader, but for some experienced critics too, the Irish writer figured chiefly as a leader of revolt, driving his scythed and jaunting car through the proprieties, dealing death-blows to conventions, literary and social, and furthering the iconoclastic task blandly begun by Lytton Strachey.

With our student of the latter years, when the centuries have come of age, these considerations are unlikely to weigh much. The qualities he may be expected to dwell on will be Joyce’s amazing command of the English language, surpassed by Shakespeare only; his attitude of superb detachment from his subject; and his gift of imposing order on the “farragineous, all-including chronicles” that compose his major works.

His command of language is illustrated throughout *Ulysses*, where the style and vocabulary vary constantly in sympathy with the theme, and in which (as can be ascertained from the excellent Word Index to *Ulysses* compiled by Professor Hanley and others) nearly thirty thousand *different* words are employed. A computation of the wordage in the *Wake* would certainly give at least thrice this number, and, though many of the words employed are not to be found in dictionaries, none is a “nonsense” word, and by far the greater part are basically English.

The attitude of detachment, carried to a point hitherto undreamt-of in *Finnegans Wake*, was foreshadowed in a passage

of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. "The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, paring his fingernails." In point of fact, this early work, the *Portrait*, though it goes much farther in this direction than its first draft (a large part of which has recently been published under the title *Stephen Hero*, this being the name which Joyce had originally chosen for his study in autobiography), is far from showing such detachment. In *Ulysses*, too, we are conscious now and again, if rarely, of the personality of the artist, like an ungloved marauder, leaving a faint imprint on the narrative. And in the silent monologue (*monologue intérieur*) of the chief figure, Mr. Bloom, advertisement-cannasser in a small way, we occasionally find traces of a subtlety of thought or niceness of expression beyond the probable range of such a character. However, one needs to walk warily in this respect; Joyce has a knack of rounding on his critics and justifying seeming inconsistency. Thus, in the last episode, the famous unpunctuated, desultory-seeming monologue of Mrs. Bloom on the verge of sleep, when she is musing on her early days at Gibraltar, she pictures "the fowl market all clucking outside Larby Sharons and the poor donkeys slipping half asleep and the vague fellows in the cloaks asleep in the shade on the steps . . . and the castanets and the night we missed the boat at Algeciras and the watchman going about serene with his lamp . . ." Here the words "vague" and "serene," so Joyce once told me, brought him a reprimand from an otherwise friendly critic; they were much too precious, and unlikely to be used by a naïve, quite unliterary woman like Molly Bloom. Actually, Joyce said, they were echoes of common Spanish words she used to hear in Gibraltar: *vago*, a vagrant, and *sereno*, the watchman's cry as he goes his rounds, "All's well!"

As for Joyce's detachment from moral or sociological implications, it is as absolute as the indifference of nature herself towards her offspring. It seems hard for even the most understanding of Joyce's commentators to recognise this aspect of his genius for what it is; not callousness but remoteness, an instinctive standing-back from the details of experience so as to see the pattern into which they fall. I have a natural reluctance in differing from an eminent authority on Joyce and one whose insight into the Joycean mind is at times almost uncanny, but I cannot agree with

Mr. Levin when he sees in the new Ulysses, Mr. Bloom, a tragic hero. "His Odyssey is the epic of psychological frustrations and social maladjustments." Actually, Mr. Bloom is on the whole a cheerful little man; he displays a certain forwardness which occasionally lands him in snubs, and indeed, in the Cyclops' cave, narrowly escapes physical violence. But, generally speaking, he has a satisfactory day, and if one strikes a balance between his pleasurable and painful moments, there is little to turn the scale. Which, surely, is about the most a middle-aged, small-business man, of no particular repute or competence, could reasonably expect. In the course of almost daily conversations with Joyce, when I was writing my *Study of 'Ulysses'* and collaborating in the translation of *Ulysses* into French (and many problems of emotive nuance had to be debated in quest of the *mot juste*), I never had the impression that Joyce regarded Bloom as in any sense pathetic, or a victim of "social maladjustments." Ulysses, too, had his setbacks, but there is nothing pitiful about him—and Mr. Bloom was *heureux comme Ulysse*.

✓ No less striking than this attitude of godlike detachment in which the artist is "refined out of existence" is Joyce's sense and power of *composition*, as a painter would describe it. While taking for his subject-matter the whole of human experience (condensed in *Ulysses* into a single day's events; in the *Wake* into a Dublin Night's Dream), Joyce imposed on it what he calls in the *Portrait* "the rhythm of beauty." "Rhythm," he explains, "is the first formal aesthetic relation of part to part in any aesthetic whole, or of an aesthetic whole to its part or parts, or of any part to the aesthetic whole of which it is a part." (This definition has the true scholastic siccidity affected by Stephen Dedalus, otherwise Joyce as a young man.) But, while it is relatively easy for the artist to impose this rhythm on a limited theme (as in a sonnet) or on a thin slice of experience—and many artists have achieved it—it is a very different matter when the artist handles not a fragment but the whole of life.

It is this all-includingness that most of all, perhaps, differentiates Joyce's later from his earlier work, and from that of almost all other writers—except of course, Shakespeare, "the greatest creator after God." Thus *Ulysses*—if I may quote myself—"is like a great net let down from heaven including in the infinite variety of its take the magnificent and the petty, the holy

and the obscene, inter-related, mutually symbolic. In this story of a Dublin day we have an epic of mankind." And, in *Finnegans Wake*, the net employed had a yet finer mesh.

Joyce, in fact, carried out what in her brilliant study of Apollinaire (*Horizon*, No. 62), Miss Cecily Mackworth describes as the aim of the Cubists at the turn of the century. *Sans les poètes*, Apollinaire wrote, *sans les artistes, les hommes s'ennuieraient vite de leur monotonie naturelle. L'idée sublime qu'ils ont de l'univers retomberait avec une vitesse vertigineuse. L'ordre qui paraît dans la nature et qui n'est qu'un effet de l'art s'évanouirait aussitôt.* "It was the problem," Miss Mackworth explains, "of perceiving new and unsuspected aspects of nature and establishing new and constantly interchanging relationships between those aspects, the factor of space, the search for a fourth dimension, which constituted the adventure of Cubism. . . . The classic motive was abolished and, instead of certain subjects' being considered the proper matter of poetry and painting, *all* subjects, even the most humble, the least classic, the least romantic, were gathered into the artist's net."

But, though in the passage just quoted, the modern artist is said to have abolished the classic motive, our twenty-first century student may well describe Joyce's later works as the classics of their age. He will of course be using the term "classic" in a special sense. In a Presidential Address delivered before the Virgil Society, Mr. T. S. Eliot chose for his theme the question, "What is a Classic?" and in the course of a characteristically wise and lucid survey of the subject, made the following remarks. "If there is one word on which we can fix, which will suggest the maximum of what I mean by the term 'a classic,' it is the word *maturity*. I shall distinguish between the universal classic, like Virgil, and the classic which is only such in relation to the other literature in its own language, or according to the view of life of a particular period. A classic can only occur when a civilization is mature; when a language and literature are mature; and it must be the work of a mature mind. It is the importance of that civilization and that language, as well as the comprehensiveness of the mind of the individual poet, which gives the universality."

Evidently it is impossible to regard either *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake* as a universal classic, such as the *Aeneid*. No one, I

venture to think, in the light of subsequent events, would say that our civilization was mature in the years when these works were written; still less could this be said of our literature or language. The truth, no doubt, is that never in the history of this country have the conditions prevailed, necessary for the production of a universal classic. Even the eighteenth century, despite appearances, cannot be judged an age of maturity; though Peter Pan had donned a *toga virilis* and strutted his best in it, naivety showed through. In fact, as Mr. Eliot describes the eighteenth century, it was "in a manner of speaking a provincial age." And for the forty years which followed the débâcle of the aesthetic movement of the 'nineties the term "provincial" is probably too lenient.

But in the special sense in which a classic is such in relation to the other literature of its own language and times, as summing up in appropriate diction the *Weltanschauung* of a period, the works of Joyce's maturity may fairly rank as classics. There is no doubt that what Joyce was aiming at throughout a life lamentably short but so wholly dedicated to his art that in his company one felt there was nothing he had yet to learn about it, was the making of a work on the grand scale and in the great tradition, "so written to after times as they should not willingly let it die." And this aim he certainly achieved, not once but twice in a much briefer span of years than Milton's.

Joyce's early work, *Chamber Music*, *Dubliners* and the *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* may be regarded as preparatory to the vast enterprise of his maturity. The poems in *Chamber Music* have received less than their due. "I have written the most perfect lyric since Shakespeare," Joyce is reported to have declared of one of them, with the half-humorous arrogance characteristic of many a poet's youth. (I remember hearing Flecker talk in much the same style in his undergraduate days.) In the period which had just ended—that of the golden 'nineties—poets dreamt of creating "the perfect lyric" (*Cinara* and *The Last Journey* are examples of their successes), much as modern writers of detective stories dream of a Perfect Crime. This ideal of a formal perfection such as Horace achieved in many of his Odes was in the Latin tradition, and it was largely owing to the impact of French culture that our poets of the 'nineties attained a delicate precision of form for whose precedent in our literature we must go back to the Eliza-

bethans. It was the brief flowering of an exotic growth that never quite acclimatized itself in the ruder North. Joyce in his verse always kept to the standards of his formative years and the last volume of his lyrics, many of them composed during the writing of *Ulysses*, maintains, despite its half-mocking title *Pomes Penyeach*, the Latin elegance we associate with the French symbolists.

The prose of his early period, too, is somewhat in the 'nineties manner. Here, for example, is a passage from an essay written by Joyce at the age of twenty and published in a Dublin magazine. Its subject is that brilliant Irishman J. C. Mangan, mystic, patriot and orientalist, whose brief life ended tragically in 1849.

"Though even in the best of Mangan the presence of alien emotions is sometimes felt, the presence of an imaginative personality reflecting the light of imaginative beauty is more vividly felt. East and West meet in the personality (we know how); images interweave there like soft luminous scarves and words ring like brilliant mail, and whether the song is of Ireland or of Istanbul it has the same refrain, a prayer that peace may come again to her who has lost her peace, the moonwhite pearl of his soul, Ameen. Music and odours and lights are spread about her, and he would search the dew and the sands that he might set another glory near her face. A scenery and a world have grown up about her face, as they will about any face which the eyes have regarded with love. Vittoria Colonna and Laura and Beatrice—even she upon whose face many lives have cast that shadowy delicacy, as of one who broods upon distant terrors and riotous dreams, and that strange stillness before which love is silent, Mona Lisa—embody one chivalrous idea, which is no mortal thing, bearing it bravely above the accidents of lust and faithfulness and weariness: and she whose white and holy hands have the virtue of enchanted hands, his virgin flower, the flower of flowers, is no less than these an embodiment of that Idea."

The debt to Pater is evident and implicitly acknowledged in the Mona Lisa reference. But this is no pastiche; the prose has an authentic beauty of its own, and the most that can be said against it is that it "dates," as early, immature work is so apt to do. One is reminded of the early Chopinesque work of Scriabin, in which no trace or even promise may be found of the vast harmonic innovations, the new, amazing world of sound disclosed to those few who have ears to hear, in his last sonatas and tone-poems.



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A considerable advance towards maturity and a personal style is shown in Joyce's next work, *Dubliners*, completed in 1905 but not published until 1914. This group of *nouvelles*, "epiphanies" as Joyce would call them (his explanation of this term is given in *Stephen Hero* and there is a jesting allusion to it in *Ulysses*), if superficially resembling tales by Maupassant or Tchekov, is more akin to Flaubert's shorter works, in texture and technique. Flaubert is one of the three or four authors whose every line Joyce claimed to have read, and his influence is to be seen in the works of nearly all the *avant-garde* of forty years ago. Despite their many excellences, the tales in *Dubliners* are, in a sense, "provincial," and one feels that their author has not yet quite found himself.

In *Dubliners*, however, we discover what in his later works was to develop almost into an obsession, Joyce's profound interest in words—not so much for their etymology or connotation, as for their sound and aura. In the first paragraph of the first tale in *Dubliners*, the narrator says :

"Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word *paralysis*. It had always sounded strangely in my ears, like the word *gnomon* in Euclid, and the word *simony* in the Catechism. But now it sounded to me like the name of some maleficent and sinful being. It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work."

Again, in the clearly autobiographical *Araby*, an epiphany of Joyce's boyhood, we read. "The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me."

But even in this early work Joyce's interest went farther than the cult of individual words ; one is also conscious of his unremitting quest for the *phrase juste*, the perfect cadence, the formula of incantation. This gives a certain disharmony to some of the tales, the purple patches stand out over-clearly against the studiously drab background of the narrative. Joyce had not yet outgrown the belief that, as someone has put it, "fine phrases make fine bards." It was not till his third phase that he employed the technique, carried to perfection in *Ulysses* and the *Wake*, of scrupulously integrating style with them.

As Mr. Louis Golding has remarked, "a sense of prelude hangs over every page of the *Portrait*." As a study of the development of an adolescent mind, of the struggles of a greatly gifted young

man to keep his personality intact in an uncongenial and sometimes actively hostile environment, it stands out in uncontested eminence amongst the many autobiographical novels on this theme. The rapid evolution of Joyce's style can be seen by a comparison of the recently published fragment of *Stephen Hero* (an early version of the *Portrait*), written, as Professor Theodore Spencer proves beyond all doubt in an excellent introduction, between 1904 and 1906, and the final version, published in 1914.

One of the most interesting features of the *Portrait* is the long discussion of aesthetics towards its close, in something of the form of a Platonic dialogue. It is noteworthy that Stephen Dedalus (that is, young James Joyce) derives his theory of beauty directly from a brief passage in St. Thomas Aquinas. "*Ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur: integritas, consonantia, claritas.*" I translate it so: *Three things are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony and radiance.*" Joyce follows up with a careful analysis of the meaning of these terms, and it is clear that the beauty he aimed at in his work, from beginning to end, derived from this definition; it was the serene beauty which we see realized in Greek statuary and temples, and in the *Odyssey*; in the *Acneid* and the Horatian Odes. The creative instant, for Joyce, is that one when the clear radiance of the aesthetic image "is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony." It is a "luminous silent stasis of aesthetic pleasure."

In this connexion I am indebted to Mr. J. P. M. Stern (of St. John's College, Cambridge) for some comments of much value for the light they throw on Joyce's aesthetic outlook. The point he makes is one of more than merely academic interest. After the publication in *Horizon* (September, 1944) of my paper on *The Latin Background of James Joyce's Art*\* he wrote to point out that Joyce's quotation from St. Thomas is an abridgment. The passage in the *Summa* runs:

*Ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur: primo quidem integritas sive perfectio; quae enim diminuta sunt, turpia sunt; et debita proportio sive consonantia; et iterum claritas, unde, quae habent colorem nitidum, pulchra esse dicuntur.* There are three things required for beauty: first, a certain integrity of completeness, for diminution causes

\*By kind permission of the Editor, I am allowed to incorporate some passages of that paper in the present study.

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ugliness ; and a due proportion or harmony ; and again a clearness, whence those things that have a bright colour are said to be beautiful.

"First," Mr. Stern points out, "Joyce's version of the Thomist definition of beauty may equally well be applied to concepts divine or secular, whereas St. Thomas was here clearly concerned with the beauty of worldly things only. Secondly, *Integritas sive perfectio* means not only wholeness but also *perfection*, hardly that 'the aesthetic image is at first luminously apprehended as selfbounded and selfcontained upon the immeasurable background of space or time' (*Portrait*, p. 241). Thirdly, of *claritas* Joyce says : 'The connotation of the word, Stephen said, is rather vague. Aquinas uses a term which seems to be inexact' (*Portrait*, p. 242), and evolves hence the theory that this radiance results in 'the luminous silent stasis of aesthetic pleasure.' But St. Thomas defines *claritas* expressedly by *quae habent colorem nitidum*, it is those things that have a bright colour of which he speaks, and he leaves no doubt as to the connotation of the term." In short Mr. Stern contests, with good authority, "the validity of Joyce's claim to have drawn his theory of the static nature of art directly from St. Thomas of Aquinas." Actually, as Mr. Stern observed in a subsequent letter, it would seem that, on the whole, art meant little to St. Thomas in any other than a very concrete, obvious way.

It is natural for a young man to seek to father his opinions on a master whom he has studied closely and reveres. But Joyce was thirty years of age when he completed his final version of the *Portrait*, and a comparison of this with the first version (described by him as "a schoolboy production") shows that he applied to it his maturer mind. In the nature of an introduction to, or programme for, the major work he was just beginning ; it clarified his views on art. And deliberately he linked up these views with an aesthetic theory summarily, almost casually, enounced by St. Thomas.

This desire to build on a time-proved basis is peculiarly characteristic of Joyce. We find it operating in the structure of *Ulysses*, which is deeply imbued with the Homeric theme, and hardly less with religious symbolism. The book opens with a religious formula, *Introibo ad altare Dei*, and at its climax a Black Mass is celebrated. This is the famous brothel scene (*Circe*), which

as Blake said of biotels in general is indeed "built with the bricks of religion." Already in his early work (*Dubliners*) Joyce had employed in that remarkable story, *Grace*, a technique combining an apocalyptic background—that of the Dantean triptych—with wholly modern motifs. The story opens in the basement lavatory of a public-house; a commercial traveller sprawls at the foot of the stairs down which he has fallen after some heavy drinking in the taproom, and the reader is spared none of the sordid elements of the scene. This is a Katabasis, a descent into the nether world, corresponding to the *Inferno*. Next we see the injured man (he has bitten off the tip of his tongue) in bed at home. His friends, who have made a plot for Mr. Kernan's reformation, come to visit him, and announce that they intend to "wash the pot" together at a Retreat for business men. This is a *Purgatorio*. Finally we see Mr. Kernan and his cronies decorously gazing up at a powerful-looking, white-robed figure, the priest of the Jesuit Church where the Retreat is being held. "He came to speak to business men, and he would speak to them in a businesslike way. If he might use the metaphor, he said, he was their spiritual accountant," and so forth. The sermon was impressive, the light of the lamps fell on an assembly of black clothes and white collars, and the atmosphere was devout—that of a parochial *Paradiso*.

Though, as a young man, Joyce bitterly resented the narrowness of Irish Catholicism, his professed atheism sat uneasily on him. When his friend Cranly asked him why, to his mother's deep distress, he refused to communicate, suggesting that he feared the Host might be the body and blood of the Son of God, "Yes," Stephen replied, "I feel that, and I also fear it."

Obviously, to the complete unbeliever, a Black Mass would seem as meaningless and tedious as the Holy Eucharist. His treatment of the Black Mass in the episode of *Circe* makes it plain that this was not the case with Joyce, who, as I often felt on the rare occasions when our conversation turned on such subjects, was indelibly imbued with the religious sense. And, in the *Circe* episode, like Milton heroizing Satan, he gave expression to a Manichean strain that is still more evident in *Finnegans Wake*.

The *Wake* opens with a prolonged roll of thunder, reminding us that the fear of the sky (the heavens personify the first of the gods for all primitive peoples) is the beginning of wisdom. This

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is the view of the philosopher-historian Vico, whose cyclical interpretation of history was employed by Joyce in his last work; much as, for *Ulysses*, he put under contribution the equally monumental and much more readable work of the French Homeric *savant* Victor Bérard, *Les Phéniciens et l'Odysée*, which goes far to prove that the Odyssean periplus derives from a Semitic Mirror of the Sea. (This gives Joyce a, so to speak, factual justification for making of a Jew the new Ulysses of his modern Odyssey.) No doubt certain passages in *Ulysses* are blasphemous. Yet, much as hypocrisy is the tribute vice pays to virtue, so blasphemy implies a recognition of the divine object named, "taken in vain," and challenged. And perhaps, as Renan said "*le blasphème des grands esprits est plus agréable à Dieu que le prière intéressée de l'homme vulgaire.*"

Writing these lines, I am reminded of an occasion ten years ago when we—Joyce and his family, my wife and myself—were travelling together from Zurich to Salzburg. When we were crossing the Arlberg Alp, just after the tunnel, there came "a black crack of thunder," as unexpected as that which figures in the "Lying-in Hospital" episode of *Ulysses*. The train—an electric one, if I remember rightly—stopped abruptly, darkness sifted down from the unseen sky, blotting out the peaks, and the stillness when the reverberations died away had that queer intensity peculiar to silence at a high altitude. Joyce was no physical coward; he faced many painful operations on his eyes, performed almost without anaesthetics, with amazing fortitude. But now I could see his long, expressive fingers twitching, his face was white, and his look conveyed that rare emotion, awe. A voice had spoken "out of the tempest . . ."

Perhaps one of the reasons why much recent writing seems loosely rooted and apt to wilt before maturity, is the lack of an apprehension of the numinous, of something permanent behind the *flammanitia moenia mundi*, and of the efficacy of ritual. More than any writer of his time, Joyce was conscious of the flux of appearances and the artist's need for something solid to build on, a Rock among the quicksands. And the majestic movement of *Ulysses*, the surge and thunder of the *Wakes*, owe much to their creator's religious sense.

"The proud potent titles clanged over Stephen's memory the triumph of their brazen bells: *et unam sanctam catholicam et*

*apostolicam ecclesiam*: the slow growth and change of rite and dogma like his own rare thoughts, a chemistry of stars. Symbol of the apostles in the mass for pope Marcellus, the voices blended, singing alone loud in affirmation: and behind their chant the vigilant angel of the church militant disarmed and menaced her heresiarchs."

Equally characteristic of Joyce's later work is its pervasion with a sense of history. "The poet," as Mr. T. S. Eliot has pointed out, "must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career." This continuous development of a consciousness of the past was foreshadowed in the *Portrait*. "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience." And, closely and deliberately linked up as it is with the *Odyssey*, *Ulysses* draws its nourishment from the past. The Homeric paradigm informs the whole structure, and attentive readers will find constant recalls of the Homeric narrative in its phraseology and even in its proper names, as well as in its general lay-out. In the *Wake* the process is carried still further; past and present coalesce in monstrous composite figures, vitally human despite their Protean metamorphoses.

But while these elements, the religious and the historical, compose the solid background of Joyce's two major works, they remain no more than a background, the screen on which the ever-moving picture unfolds itself. This, of course, differentiates Joyce's work from that of Dante, Milton or Virgil, where they have greater prominence and indeed shape the theme. Joyce does not try to justify God's ways to man or *vice versa*, or to hymn the glories of an age. His object is to create a work of art, neither "didactic" nor "pornographical" (these are, in his words, "improper arts"); a thing of beauty perfectly fashioned and worthy of the old artificer, his name-father, maker of the labyrinth and the honeycomb of gold.

A passage in Mr. Frank Budgen's fascinating reminiscences of Joyce at the time when *Ulysses* was in the making (in Zurich, 1915-1919), entitled *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses"*, illustrates the extreme care with which Joyce not only chose his words but ordered their arrangement.

"I enquired about *Ulysses*. Was it progressing?"

"I have been working hard on it all day," said Joyce.

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" 'Does that mean you have written a great deal?' I said.

" 'Two sentences,' said Joyce.

" I looked sideways, but Joyce was not smiling. I thought of Flaubert.

" 'You have been seeking the *not juste*?' I said.

" 'No,' said Joyce. 'I have the words already. What I am seeking is the perfect order of the words in the sentence. There is an order in every way appropriate. I think I have it.'

" 'What are the words?' I asked.

" 'I believe I told you,' said Joyce, 'that my book is a modern Odyssey. I am now writing the *Lestrygomans* episode, which corresponds to the adventures of Ulysses with the cannibals. My hero is going to lunch. But there is a seduction motive in the Odyssey, the cannibal king's daughter. Seduction appears in my book as women's silk petticoats hanging in a shop window. The words through which I express the effects of it on my hungry hero are: "Perfume of embraces all him assailed. With hungered flesh obscurely, he mutely craved to adore." You can see for yourself in how many different ways they might be arranged.' "

This careful thought for the verbal lay-out is characteristically Latin. Most English writers content themselves with the obvious and simplest order of words—which makes, of course, for fluent reading. But the mind is not, to use Joyce's expression in the *Portrait*, "arrested." Yet, rare though such careful elegance is in contemporary or near-contemporary prose, it has at least one precedent. "A rose shook in her blood, and shadowed her cheeks. Quick breath parted the petals of her lips." If one were asked to place this quotation, one's first guess might be that it "came somewhere in *Ulysses*." Actually it comes from Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*.

As an accurate and revealing analysis of Joyce's art, and especially of his last work, *Finnegans Wake*, Mr. Harry Levin's *James Joyce* could hardly be bettered. It answers the question, "What was he up to in the *Wake*?" with authority and understanding. It is curious to look back only a few years and to find in an appreciative conspectus of Joyce's work the following conclusion. "Is *Work in Progress* (*i.e.*, the *Wake*) a superb piece of nonsense-prose springing from the gigantism of Irishness which I have mentioned already—an item flung at the heads of

critics, a breed very heartily detested by Joyce? . . . It (this explanation) will, at all events, stand on its legs—which is more than some of the others can do." Actually, of course, the *Wake* is dense with meaning, an encyclopedia of myth, ritual, religion and the tidal flux of history, with every word, no matter how grotesque its appearance, so contrived as to carry a maximum of meaning. "It is with words as with sunbeams; the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn," and in his last work Joyce carried condensation to a point hitherto unknown in literature.

This condensation was necessitated by the vastness of his material. What differentiates Joyce from nearly every other writer of his day is his awareness that in those trivial details which even the deliberately realistic writer rejects because they do not fit into his picture, in *everything* indeed, there exists an equivalence of value, not of course for the moralist, but for the artist—a fact which many a great painter has realised in composing a Still Life. The humblest object can give the artist all he needs; "nothing is indifferent in Nature, and a pebble more or less upon a road may crush or profoundly alter the fortunes of the greatest men and even of the greatest empires."

*Dans une mort d'insecte on voit tous les désastres,  
Un rond d'azur suffit pour voir passer les astres.*

In *Ulysses* every incident is relevant, each word carries its full weight of association, and for all the wild vitality and seeming disorder of the narrative, Joyce works to a discipline as severe as that of the Greek dramatists; whom indeed he outdoes in his observance of the Unities. And if into the Witches' Cauldron of the *Wake* there enter more and even queerer ingredients than those employed by the Weird Sisters for their gruel thick and slab, and stranger visions rise, here, too, every ingredient plays its part, each vision *tells*.

It may seem that I have dwelt overmuch on Joyce's conception of the function of the artist as one who imposes rhythm and pattern on the chaos of the phenomenal world, and views the play of human passions on the stage of history with a detachment quite alien from modern thought. Yet surely in the contemporary dark night of culture, such an attitude is at once a reassurance for lovers of the beauty that has no frontiers, and an example for the artist, always prone to embrace some Cause or Movement—to the detriment of his true vocation.



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"The prevailing attitude of *Ulysses*," as Mr. Budgen sees it, "is a very humane scepticism—not of tried human values, necessary at all times for social cohesion, but of all tendencies and systems altogether." Joyce was in fact of the lineage of Montaigne, and in Montaigne we find the same distrust of systems, tendencies, and (to use the jargon of a day) ideologies. This, perhaps, is the quality that gives Joyce's major works their timelessness, and will prove the secret of their permanence. Though their setting is invariably Dublin, and the time rigorously fixed, neither *Ulysses* nor the *Wake* is likely ever to "date," or to lose its appeal for the discerning reader, whatever revision of moral and social values the future has in store.

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# Edith Sitwell

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HENRY REED

EXACTLY what a war poet is, I do not know. The people who were heard calling out for them in the early years of the war were people who had till then shown themselves, one had thought, rather indifferent to poetry; and anything likely to satisfy their needs was not likely to satisfy one's own. But one's own needs did exist, though one scarcely noticed them until, unexpectedly, poems appeared here and there which reminded one of these needs, or created them and satisfied them. This is the classic process of poetry; and some poetry of the time fulfilled it. There was an early war-poem, for example, called "Triumphal Ode, 1939," by Mr. George Barker which was an unforgettable picture of horror and pity. To read it now is to recall exactly one's sensations during the invasion of Poland—and whatever our later experiences have brought, the war has probably presented no more awful picture to the mind; it was the beginning of the war, and it seemed the end of the world. Eventually there were other good war-poems, though never very many. There were the late Alun Lewis's poems describing with a most touching pathos the shabby, unloved exile into anonymity of the soldier. These were strikingly simple and honest. Then there came the war-poems of Miss Edith Sitwell. They were unlike any other poetry of the time, and no other poetry like them has emerged.

"Though the world has slipped and gone,  
Sounds my loud discordant cry  
Like the steel birds' song on high:  
'Still one thing is left—the Bone!'

Then out danced the Babioun.  
She sat in the hollow of the sea—  
A socket whence the eye's put out—  
She sang to the child a lullaby  
(The steel birds' nest was thereabout).

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'Do, do, do, do—  
Thy mother's hied to the vaster race :  
The Pterodactyl made its nest  
And laid a steel egg in her breast—  
Under the Judas-coloured sun.  
She'll work no more, nor dance, nor moan,  
And I am come to take her place.  
Do, do.

There's nothing left but earth's low bed—  
(The Pterodactyl fouls its nest) :  
But steel wings fan thee to thy rest,  
And wingless truth and larvæ lie  
And eyeless hope and handless fear—  
All these for thee as toys are spread,  
Do—do' "

Almost all the war world seems expressed here; and there is no need to pick apart the layers of it. The image of the baboon nurturing an orphaned baby is unparalleled in its rightness as an image for to-day ; and I sometimes think the poem which contains it could only have been written by someone who has experienced in maturity not only one but two Great Wars, and who can therefore get an unblinkered glimpse of war's real nature.

" Red is the bed of Poland, Spain,  
And thy mother's breast, who has grown wise  
In that fouled nest. If she could rise,  
Give birth again.

In wolfish pelt she'd hide thy bones  
To shield thee from the world's long cold,  
And down on all fours shouldst thou crawl  
For thus from no height canst thou fall—  
Do, do,"

In another poem which appeared at a much later date the image of mother and child is returned to, again with great symbolic force. This time it is the child who is dead ; the mother says ;

" But the roads are too busy for the sound of your feet,  
And the lost men, the rejected of life, who tend the  
wounds

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That life has made as if they were a new sunrise, whose  
human speech is dying.  
From want, to the rusted voice of the tiger, turn not their  
heads lest I hear your child-voice crying  
In that hoarse tiger-voice ; ' I am hungry ! am cold ! '  
Lest I see your smile upon lips that were made for the kiss  
that exists not,  
The food that deserts them—those lips never warm with  
love, but from the world's fever,  
Whose smile is a gap into darkness, the breaking apart  
Of the long-impeding earthquake that waits in the heart.  
That smile rends the soul with the sign of its destitution,  
It drips from the last long pangs of the heart, self-devour-  
ing

And tearing the seer."

The poet sees in this poem something wider and more generalized than the war : it is a whole social disconnectedness, of which the war, referred to in the last line of the poem as " the worlds that are falling," is only a partial symbol. There is, no doubt, spiritual disintegration coupled with this vision, but more remarkable in poetry is the poet's sense of the horror of poverty, want, frustration, ignorance, loss, and destitution. It is a poem exceptionally wide in its understanding, as in its gentleness and pity.

The amplitude of Miss Sitwell's later poetry, its wide sweep of feeling, which takes in agony and faith almost simultaneously, the repeated magnificence of its language, have sometimes occasioned surprise. But they are no more than the emergence into full power of things which have been either natively implicit or consciously aimed at in her work for a couple of decades. Her early work is, now, not always easy to read ; but we may make surprising discoveries while reading it.

Miss Sitwell is almost an exact contemporary of Mr. T. S. Eliot. They have both in their time been regarded as *enfants terribles*, and Miss Sitwell at least appears to have enjoyed this. They have both become as popular, and as consolatory (or " helpful ") to the general reader as a poet well can become without compromising with popular or vulgar taste. Neither of them has in fact deviated from a dedication to the art of poetry and from the due relation of their art to the facts of personal

experience. There are other points of comparison which cannot be ignored : and first the great sense of continuity which one gets when reading the work of either of them.

With so much art, so much history, and so many contrasting biographies behind us, it is almost impossible when thinking of artists of the past not to think of their lives as marked off into periods : one thinks of this man's early novels, middle novels and later novels, that man's last quartets, another's " period of the great tragedies," another's " rose " period. It is difficult now for a serious artist not to think of his own life as having—or, more often, as about to have—similar configurations. Most artists have moments of dedication and re-dedication, and some, like Wordsworth and Dante, have told us about them. And, beyond this, it is inevitable that at some time an artist should see something before him more detailed than a mere effulgence, however wide and however bright : some suspicion of the successive instruments which it will be his destiny to use, some idea of the arduous of preparation he will have to endure in order to use them. Even when, for a moment, the beauty and accomplishment of so much of Miss Sitwell's work are set aside, her *œuvre* is remarkable both for its continuity and for its consciousness of this. She is well aware of the before and the after implied in any work she is engaged on, and the reader participates in that awareness. It is worth adding that Miss Sitwell has also a strong sense of her own position in the history of English poetry; not her eminence, but her situation. She is conscious of the writers before her, and, like other fine artists of her century—one thinks at once of Hardy, Yeats, Mr. Forster, Mr. Eliot—she is conscious of the writers after her, and can bear to treat them with courteous sympathy in an age notable for neither courtesy nor sympathy between its generations.

There are also two points of contrast between Mr. Eliot and Miss Sitwell ; Mr. Eliot is a formal Christian, including in his beliefs a kind of assimilation of other ways of living ; while Miss Sitwell is—I suggest—a formal pagan, with also an assimilation of other ways of living. There is a final and more important difference. Mr. Eliot is a man, Miss Sitwell is a woman.

The nun Hroswitha—she lived in the tenth century, and was the first woman playwright in European literature—says in a prefatory *apologia* to one of her plays : " Though the weaving of

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verses is laid for woman's wit to accomplish, nevertheless I have attempted in this small book to sing in dactyls." Miss Sitwell, in a brief foreword to her *Collected Poems*, published about a thousand years later, says much the same thing. "No critic can be more severely conscious of the faults in some of these poems than am I. The writing of poetry is at all times a difficult matter; but women poets are faced with even more difficulties than are men poets, since technique is very largely a matter of physique, and in the past, with the exception of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, there has been no technically sufficient poem written by a woman."

Here one sees Miss Sitwell's elected path set out before her. It implies a determination to acquire mastery by arduous and unremitting application, experiment and observation. Her later poetry is that of a poet who knows that the only way for most poets to write is to try, with all the strength and self-possession possible, to penetrate a poem from beginning to end with a complete technical consciousness akin to that of music. The central core, or starting point of a poem may remain an eternal mystery of creation, like a great musical "subject"; but its development dare not be automatic.

Her studies—and a large part of her early poetry consists precisely of *études*—have taken three forms. First, there has been the study of what can be done with the language, the study of verbal orchestration—of "the effect that texture has on rhythm, and the effect that varying and elaborate patterns of rhymes and of assonances and dissonances have upon rhythm. To this part of her work belong the pieces in *Façade*, many of the *Bucolic Comedies*, and some of the songs in *Prelude to a Fairy Tale*. Secondly, there has been the search for mastery over a "line" which will be both a discipline and a liberation into freedom of expression: her mastery over the varied blank verse line, and over this line casually rhymed, and over the rhyming couplet, are her achievements here. And though her finest work—with perhaps the exception of *The Ghost Whose Lips Were Warm*—has not been done in the couplet, the individuality and freshness she has given it make it her most remarkable personal triumph. Her third study has been the study of diction, the acquisition of a personal voice, the selection of vocabulary.

While pursuing her studies Miss Sitwell has had to do what

other poets have to do · to live, not only through a good deal of experience, but through a good deal of literature as well. (It is true, I believe, that any English dramatic poet—and Miss Sitwell's later poetry is dramatic as well as lyrical—has to live through the English blank verse line, in some way or other, before he is able to give it his own inflection or distortion or variation.) That period of living through such poetry of the past as is important to him should ideally be done by the poet in the laboratory of unpublished work (though one doubts if unpublished work exists anywhere any longer), some of it must doubtless be done simply in the mind, some perhaps even unconsciously. But in fact what usually happens is that poets begin to publish while they are still under the tutelage of other poets. And one would scarcely forego the Marlowe in Shakespeare, the Milton in Keats, the Laforgue in Eliot.

Nor would one wholly forego the Rimbaud in Miss Sitwell. Indeed it is difficult to see how one could, for he dodges about her pages continually right up to the present day; this is natural, since he is a poet to whom anyone at all affected by him feels continually impelled to return. In his way, he is the Aich-poet; the prose-poems, and a few of the verse-poems such as *La Rivière de Cassis. Entends comme brame . . .* and *Bonne Pensée du Matin* bring their reader nearer to the sources of poetic inspiration more vividly than any other poetry, for the pictures they present seem to have been transfixed in words almost as soon as the poet glimpsed them. A few of the things which Miss Sitwell owes to Rimbaud or shares with him must be remarked on. He announced as an imperative for poetry *la dérèglement raisonné de tous les sens*: the systematic derangement of all the senses, the power (presumably) of perceiving with all the senses objects normally appealing to only one or two. The famous sonnet *Voyelles* will be recalled, where the colours which the vowels suggest are described. His dictum is quite apprehensible, but it seems to be more practicable as a way of receiving sensations than as a regular way of communicating them. Miss Sitwell, in a good deal of the poetry in the collected edition, enjoys describing certain things in terms usually associated with other things; but the effect is very often of an engaging eccentricity and sometimes of a tiresome one. Occasionally it is a strange, beautiful effect, as in the gardener's song in *The Sleeping Beauty*:

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“The dew all tastes of ripening leaves ;  
Dawn’s tendril fingers heap  
The yellow honeyed fruits whose clear  
Sound flows into his sleep.

Those yellow fruits and honeycomb. . . .  
‘Lulla—lullaby,’  
Shrilled the dew on the broad leaves—  
‘Time itself must die—

(—must die”).’

And in the pathetic *Aubade* (in *Bucolic Comedies*), a little song about a gawky kitchen-girl coming down in a sleepy stupor to light the fire, the reluctant morning light, which is referred to continually in terms of sound (it “creaks” and “whines”) composes the whole picture most touchingly. But more often the *dérèglement* takes on the character of a little stunt.

Miss Sitwell shares furthermore with Rimbaud a love for the quick, bright image of a building or a human figure against a shifting background. Her control over these backgrounds is by no means as virile and brilliant as Rimbaud’s ; she cannot flash a picture at one as quickly as he ; but her method is the same, and in *The Sleeping Beauty*, though one may know where one is at any given moment, one never knows where one is going to be at the next.

The most moving thing is Rimbaud in the way suddenly a “set” of illuminations, a succession of visual images, can collapse into an agonized personal cry, as at the end of the well-known *Bateau Ivre*, or at the end of the poem *Mémoire* :

“*Jouet de cet œil d’eau morne, je n’y puis prendre,  
ô canot immobile ! oh ! bras trop courts ! ni l’une  
ni l’autre fleur : ni la jaune qui m’importune,  
là : ni la bleue, amis, a l’eau couleur de cendre,*”

or at the end of the prose-poem, *Villes I*, where a detailed, almost gossipy account of an imaginary mountain-city finishes with a breath of lament : “*Quelle belle heure, quels bons bras me rendront ces régions d’où viennent mes sommeils et mes moindres mouvements ?*” The best parts of some of Miss Sitwell’s longer poems—the *Elegy on Dead Fashion* for example—occur at very similar moments, when the artificial stagery of a rustic fairyland drops apart and the true note of sorrow and lament is heard. But Miss



Sitwell seems not often to contrive these changes adequately—perhaps because they are not an effect which can be brought about by contrivance alone. The scenery in her poetry of this kind does not spontaneously erect itself out of nothing as the visions of Rimbaud do. In Miss Sitwell there is an immense fabrication: the goddesses, the shepherdesses, the water-falls, the ondines, the strawberry-beds, the mandolines, the tourelles, the turbans and the dewdrops are summoned to assemble themselves from stage dressing-rooms. There is an air of triviality about them; amusing and engaging at times, no doubt, and always pretty; but one is always waiting for the moment when they shall go. And sometimes, as in the original version of the solemn, splendid poem about death called *Metamorphosis*, one is at first debarred from getting to the real body and music of a work by the inevitable preliminary skirmish with these artifices.

It is probably Rimbaud whom Miss Sitwell has in mind as an example for her more striking experiments in rhythm, texture and sound. These experiments have always been the best-known part of Miss Sitwell's work; one has to be a dull sort of reader not to enjoy a gay, clever pattern of sound divorced from sense, or with only a dream-like thread of nonsense going across the dance of words. They are meant, of course, as transitional works; they are still part of the effort towards confidence in technique; but many of them are highly-finished and delightful; and just as music would be poorer without the music by Mr. William Walton which some of them have inspired, literature would lose something delicious if we were without *Black Mrs. Behemoth*, *Trio for two Cats on a Trombone*, "I do like to be beside the Seaside," *Hornpipe*, *Old Sir Faulk*, or the waltz and the polka from the *Prelude to a Fairy Tale*. And often they pass beyond the brilliant jazzy stage into something mellower and gentler, as in the *Aubade*, and a few others which approximate to an English equivalent for the kind of experiment which Rimbaud makes in *Fêtes de la Faim* and *Bonheur*.

The residual effect of these experiments on Miss Sitwell's work it is neither possible nor necessary to examine, though one knows that the music of the later poems is not got by native innocent talent alone. There is one poem, however, *Gold Coast Customs*, where the *bizarrie* of some of the lighter pieces is used all but perfectly in a serious theme. *Gold Coast Customs* has a

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position in Miss Sitwell's work comparable to that of *The Waste Land* in Mr. Eliot's. It is itself about a waste land · the ostensible scene of the poem is a nightmarish orgiastic funereal procession through the filth and squalor of a Gold Coast village. By allusion the scene is identified with the delights of our own civilization. It is a poem of considerable length, and it is one of the finest achievements of modern poetry, a triumph over a painful and tragic subject, a superbly successful use of a daring technique. The *staccato* jazziness if there, and it is in its right place. The *dérèglement* of the senses is there, and at last no more fitting application can be imagined; for in this savage hectic scene it is right that the light should squeal and that the mud should screech.

‘ I have seen the murdered God look through the eyes  
Of the drunkard’s smurched  
Mask as he lurched  
O’er the half of my heart that lies in the street  
Neath the dancing fleas and the foul news-sheet.  
Where, a black gap flapping,  
A white skin drum  
The cannibal houses  
Watch this come—  
Lady Bamburgher’s party : for the plan  
Is a prize for those that on all fours can  
Through the rotting slum  
Till those who come  
Could never guess from the mudcovered shapes  
Which are the rich or the mired dire apes  
As they run where the souls, dirty paper, are blown  
In the hour before dawn, through this long hell of stone.  
Perhaps if I too lie down in the mud,  
Beneath tumbrils rolling  
And mad skulls galloping  
Far from their bunches of nerves that dance  
And pace among these slums and prance,  
Beneath the noise of that hell that rolls  
I shall forget the shrunken souls  
The eyeless mud squealing “ God is dead,”.’

This poem is very much the kind of poem Rimbaud might be

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pleased to receive from the hands of a disciple. Inevitably ; for it is just such a *saison en enfer* as Rimbaud might have written of Abyssinia.

So much for the experimental and the spectacular , but we have also hinted at Miss Sitwell's preoccupation with developing more traditional forms of writing. Her devotion to Pope has brought with it a devotion to the rhyming couplet, which she has softened and mellowed for her own grave purposes , her later work is in much freer forms, but she can still, with the utmost discretion, drift into and out of a run of couplets. The poem in which she most successfully employs the couplet is, I think, the last of the *Four Elegies : The Ghost whose Lips were Warm*, which is, with *Gold Coast Customs*, her most completely satisfying poem before 1930. In all of the *Four Elegies* one discovers a new and greater expansion of feeling and expressiveness, and at the same time an elimination of the trivially pretty. A wide-compassed instrument is used throughout.

The *Ghost whose Lips were Warm* is a small masterpiece, both in its writing and its interpretation of a source. A passage from Aubrey's *Miscellanies* is quoted at the head of the poem :

"T.M., Esq., an old acquaintance of mine, hath assured me, that . . . after his first wife's death, as he lay in bed awake . . . his wife opened the Closet Door, and came into the Chamber by the Bed side, and looked upon him and stooped down and kissed him ; her Lips were warm, he fancied they would have been cold. He was about to have embraced her, but was afraid it might have done him hurt. When she went from him, he asked her when he should see her again ? She turned about and smiled, but said nothing."

The poem is a dramatic monologue ; its loose couplets, manipulated with no trace of mechanicalness or strain, are enclosed by two remarkable effects ; an isolated stanza opens the poem with a feeling of great desolation, before the speaker relaxes into his meditation :

"The ice, weeping, breaks,  
But my heart is underground.  
And the ice of its dead tears melts never. Wakes  
No sigh, no sound.  
From where the dead lie close, as those above—  
The young—lie in their first deep night of love,

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When the spring nights are fiery with wild dew, and rest  
Leaves on young leaves, and youthful breast on breast  
The dead lie soft in the first fire of spring  
And through the eternal cold, they hear birds sing,  
And smile as if the one long-treasured kiss  
Had worn away their once loved lips to this  
Remembered smile—for there is always one  
Kiss that we take to be our grave's long sun."

The poem continues, the speaker enunciating his belief that his heart has become a "black disastrous sun," whose former heat his wife has borne away to her grave. It concludes .

"But when she had been twelve months in her grave  
She came where I lay in my bed : she gave  
Her kiss. And oh, her lips were warm to me.  
And so I feared it, dared not touch and see  
If still her heart were warm . . . dust-dun, death-cold  
Lips should be from death's night. I dared not hold  
'That heart that came warm from the grave . . . afraid  
I tore down all the earth of death, and laid  
Its endless cold upon her heart. For this  
Dead man in my dress dared not kiss  
Her who laid by death's cold, lest I  
Should feel it when she came to lie  
Beside my heart. My dead love gave  
Lips warm with love though in her grave.  
I stole her kiss, the only light  
She had to warm her eternal night."

There are two particularly beautiful things about this ending : first, the haunting echoes—deliberate or unconscious, they are equally satisfying—in the rhythm of the last seven lines, of King's great *Exequy on his Dead Wife*, a perfect musical allusion ; secondly the accomplishment of the contraction, from a five-beat line to a four-beat one, in order to make this allusion : it is

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surely not at a first or second reading that one discovers that the contraction has actually taken place in mid-couplet, with the subtle help of an *enjambement*?

I referred earlier to the third of Miss Sitwell's studies ; diction. In this poem the simplicity of the language is already noticeable ; and in fact Miss Sitwell's advance in diction has—unlike that of many poets—involved a limitation rather than an increase of vocabulary. It is natural that this should be so, first for the physical reason that a complex vocabulary does not work well in such complicated sentence-structures as those which characterize Miss Sitwell's recent work. The simplicity and exactness of her rhymes are also noteworthy. Secondly, a poet's language can, in its most individual and personal resources, be only the product of his vision, bearing the same relation to that vision as his face and hands do to his character. None of Miss Sitwell's recent poems are translucently simple in their total effect ; they have often to be read many times ; and we are usually impelled to read them many times by their sensuous grace, their muscular contour, their sweeping eloquent quality of singing. But their vision is, in the end, simple. The world of her imagination has its own set of co-ordinates, around and between the repeated images for which, she spins her poetry : the same things recur and recur, like the objects of heraldry, yet always newly ordered at the dictates of a new penetration into experience ; and though these basic images are few, they seem to include everything, and to constitute a whole mythology : the young and the old, the earth, the sun and the moon, the country roads, the dust, the butterflies and the winds, the wild animals, the blood, the flesh and the bone—and the heart. Her world is a world of archetypes, brightly lit, but lit by natural light. Here is one of the shorter pieces from a late volume ; its title is *Heart and Mind* :

' Said the Lion to the Lioness—"When you are amber dust,  
No more a raging fire like the heat of the Sun  
(No liking but all lust)—  
Remember still the flowering of the amber blood and bone  
The rippling of bright muscles like a sea,  
Remember the rose-prickles of bright paws  
Though we shall mate no more  
Till the fire of that sun the heart and the moon-cold bone  
are one."

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Said the Skeleton lying upon the sands of Time—  
“The great gold planet that is the morning heat of the Sun  
Is greater than all gold, more powerful  
Than the tawny body of a Lion that fire consumes  
Like all that grows or leaps . . . so is the heart  
More powerful than all dust. Once I was Hercules  
Or Samson, strong as the pillars of the seas :  
But the flames of the heart consumed me, and the mind  
Is but a foolish wind.”

Said the Sun to the Moon—“When you are but a lonely  
white crone,  
And I, a dead King in my golden armour somewhere in a  
dark wood,  
Remember only this of our hopeless love  
That never till Time is done  
Will the fire of the heart and the fire of the mind be one.”

Her later poetry is extremely impressive. No woman poet in English, or, so far as I am aware, in any other modern language has added so largely to that body of poetry which one will wish repeatedly to turn to ; and though her best work has been produced in the last five or six years, no point of dichotomy can be found between her recent work and the work which has preceded it. It is rather that at some point there have become accessible to the poet new springs of power and fertility ; there is a complete liberation from the inhibitions of which the early prettinesses were perhaps the outward signs. Regularly in her later work there are echoes and whole quotations from earlier poems. *The Ghost whose Lips were Warm* is quoted or paraphrased almost entire in the much more elaborate later poem *One Day in Spring*. And, as the latest version of the poem *Metamorphosis* shows, she has a capacity for ruthless revision. One has the sense that the poet, after long heart-searching, has at last found an adequate and consistent context for earlier, more fragmentary, illuminations. Her landscape, like her idiom, is her own ; it appears at first as a wholly personal landscape because her imagery and her cadences are so certainly not available to the *pasticheur*. But it is a universal landscape, humanly inhabited ; with the world of thought, feeling and passion that lies behind and beneath it, one has an underground allegiance not always

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consciously acknowledged. In no other way can I define what it is that ties one to her poetry even when the meaning of a poem is imprecise. And the poet who can command and sustain that allegiance from a reader is not, I believe, in any sense to be called a minor poet.

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# J. B. Priestley

★

JACK LINDSAY

BEFORE one begins to make the effort, Priestley does not seem so difficult a writer to sum up. The writer and the man are patently one; and the broad hard-headed humanity which his name calls up seems a plain enough characteristic. But when one tries to get beyond the immediate associations and state exactly why it is that he has played so big a part in our world, one finds that he is not at all so simple a case as he seemed at first glance. What is it that has given him so effective a key to the hearts and minds of the British reading public? For he is a writer with definite ideas on his craft and its function, and a definite method of his own. In the last resort one must admit that he has taken the place which Wells and Shaw held for the previous generation; and that is a shift in relations which means much more than the change of public allegiance from one writer to another for purely literary reasons. But the highbrow who sniffs at such allegiances altogether, and finds derogatory and non-aesthetic explanations, is as much at fault as those who would see only a change in literary fashions.

In casting round for a clue, I stumbled on the scene in *Let the People Sing* where the lad with peculiar dreams is being tried before the madly antiquated Petty Sessions. Daisy comments, "There used to be one of them old Karno sketches just like this. Only better of course." It is one of those asides in which an author, momentarily self-conscious, tries to forestall criticism. For, after catching Daisy's whisper, one realises what the whole thing is—a riotously funny music-hall sketch; and this admission of Priestley through the over-rouged lips of Daisy seemed to me to illumine a great deal of his artistic method. There is a lot of the music-hall in it.

If that seems a depreciation of Priestley, it is a sad thing; and Priestley would no doubt be ready enough to lose as readers any who did think it a depreciation. I hope so. The music-hall is the



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one genuinely popular form of entertainment which has carried on out of the general wreck of folk-culture in England. True, the present music-hall can hardly compare with that of the '60's, or even the '90's, as a mouthpiece of the people, but it still has a good measure of vitality in it, and where could a writer like Priestley better find a symbol and method for his defence of the people and their needs, their demand for a fuller life? In my opinion, at least the step from the debating-society of Shaw or Wells into the lively music-hall of Priestley's vigorous fancy is more than a step to the good. It is a step into a new dimension of culture. It means the regaining of something essential to our national culture—the first basic movement towards revivifying our tradition and the gathering of forces that lead into our democratic future.

Those are a lot of large words to evolve out of Daisy's joke; but I think they are warranted. Consider Priestley's two most characteristic novels, *The Good Companions* and *Let the People Sing*. They both deal directly with music-hall shows and players. In both the main theme is the getting together of troupers and their fight to keep together and to carry on with the job despite the worst that the world can do. It was no accident that it was through *The Good Companions* that Priestley first gained a wide audience.

In that book he releases his good-humoured fantasy of character. It is not only that he writes about troupers, who have themselves shaken out in their warm environment into rich blooms of temperament, but he creates the world afresh within the music-hall mould. This is the living element of creativity in the work, which the intelligentsia has missed but the ordinary reader has enjoyed. At its worst this kind of writing mistakes a few set tricks of behaviour or speech for characterization: at its best it casts a vivid light over the world, where people are exuberantly and unmistakeably themselves, revolving in their own rapid orbits of identity but linked together in a single great gyre of delighted life. One's mind of course turns at once to Dickens.

I believe that Priestley does not like being called Dickensian. I myself can think of no higher term of praise, if it is given with understanding. But it is true that it is nowadays often intended as a bouquet with a brick inside it. It is not fashionable to see the

vast creative verve of Dickens as enclosing profound psychological elements. It is set in opposition to the deeper space of the spirit which is supposed to emerge from the use of introspective devices and shadowings. I consider that the opposition is fictitious and not to be encouraged. Certainly the Dickensian approach can fall into the groove of caricature, of distorted emphasis and the substitution of peculiarities for the living constituents of personality—just as the psychological approach can break up into the trivial network of anxieties of the jumble-sale of associations, in which all character blurs out. But it is as much for its virtues as its vices that the term *Dickensian* suggests in the mouth of most of our critics a noisy superficiality. For it infers a force of animal spirits which at least disrupts the drawing-room (or brothel) of nervous susceptibility in which the 'psychological' school tends to meander or moan.

*Dickensian* is used to mean the flat, the tuppence coloured, the two-dimensional. Flatness is a strange description for the folk in Dickens's world who are so rumbustiously in the round that we tingle from the handshake of their advent. But where is the development? asks the anti-Dickensian. We cannot tell what these people think; they have no springs of renewal in themselves, no depths.

That is only a half-truth, which is hard to maintain when we think of the close link between Dickens and Dostoevsky, and their similar basis in the popular thriller. The fact is that the problem of development is merely shifted in Dickens from the individual to the mass, from the suffering hero to the whole complex of movement. Recall, say, *Little Dorritt* or *Our Mutual Friend* or *Great Expectations* in its totality, and the experience of life recorded in the theme (as distinct from the "story") is one in which decay, death and renewal is as basic almost as in Dostoevsky. And even within the margin of each particular characterization we are haunted by a sense of the unpredictable, the wayward and the larger-than-life.

What the dissenters mean when they talk of the Dickensian flatness is at least in part his pictorial clarity, his unflinching sense of the details of physical existence—not in the Joycean sense, where the individual fades out under the burden of fluttering, sensory multiplicity; but in the dramatic sense, where the individual keeps forcing on us the particular facts of his presence,

whether it is a tic, or a wart, or a funny sort of tie—because somehow his sense of being alive and being himself has become tangled up with that tic, wart or tie.

And that brings us back to the stage. (Dickens, it will be remembered, had a passion for private theatricals.) Priestley has the quick eye for the idiosyncratic detail, and that quality of magnification, which is a stumbling block for the intellectually shifty, but a delight for people in general; and this creative element is in many ways bound up for him with the stage. Not the West End stage, but the music-hall or the small-town roadshow. He, as cannily based on wordly fact as any other Yorkshireman, yet feels drawn out to the feckless folk who are fools in worldly eyes but manage somehow to rebuke the world's judgement by their fellowship in laughter and in the magnification of life.

The Good Companions come together and succeed in hanging on despite all the dirty tricks that the money-world can play them. They are a symbolic company, rowdy and various, set against the miserly ways of the competitive world. For good and bad, these folk have developed on lines in which the desire to please and to act in a group have meant more than a bank-balance, and so the Dickensian growth of their personalities, pushed maybe into all kinds of odd shapes, is yet somehow a defiant expression of human freedom, and they stand for something beyond the normal sell-out.

But the weakness of the concept appears in the *dénouement*. The troupe should have gone on for ever, aging and ageless. But to polish off the story, Priestley has to smash up the gathering, to give conventional rewards to hero and heroine, and so on. Two patterns conflict, and in a sense the highbrow can say that the philistine has triumphed and exposed the hollowness of the symbol. But the general reader is wiser here, as so often. The switch-over into the normal world and its trite system of allocating "rewards and fairies" does not for them disturb the basic moral: that life is good when it is a life of fellowship in a worthy and merry cause, and that rewards should come to the righteous who enjoy and give enjoyment.

But in *Let the People Sing* Priestley has gone a long way forward in the coincidence of symbol and actuality. Now the troupe becomes a direct emblem of resistance. They come bang into collision with big-business and political reaction. They refuse to

go down, and call in their allies, lots more music-hall artists, of course. The faded magicians of a fuller life come gaily back to the scene, in alliance with new forces, the folk of the township and the workers of the factory; and this time they triumph. There is no return to the compromise. The townsfolk, who have been downtrodden and deprived of all that gives hearty self-expression to their lives, are drawn into the song which echoes on and out of the book. They march on into their own. Their seizure of power is the storming of the town hall where their life can be centred on enjoyment. Higher culture, in the person of the fugitive professor, is on the side of red-nose and factory-worker; and even a section of the ruling-class, when sufficiently declassified with friendly booze and weakened in its imperialist paranoia, comes down with a hiccup on the singing side.

I do not want to overstrain the symbolism, or the import of the music-hall in Priestley's mind, but I do think that there is no better way of getting at that element which has made him a national figure, a genuine spokesman of our people in tremendous days. In *Eden End* when the girl runs off from suburbia because she wants a full life, where does she go? On to the stage. And who is it that busts up the decorum and fake-dream of suburbia? It is Charles the toper who is a roadshow actor-type of the breezy tradition. And consider the following passage from *Daylight on Saturday*, which rounds off the account of the ENSA show in the factory-canteen.

"A fat middle-aged woman, most unsuitably dressed and raddled, and an elderly painted buffoon, shouting and posturing, yelling in coarse accents their stale old jokes, busy vulgarizing the sex instinct, performing without grace or wit. Gaping at the tiny stage, staring and nudging, guffawing and screaming, there are the thousands of workers of all ages, making what seem animal noises that yet no animal has ever made, and seeming all mindless eyes and ears, wide loud mouths and clapping hands. A strange and no doubt a deplorable scene.

"Yet there was about it an air of release and innocent happiness; a kind of struggling goodness in it; a mysterious promise, not mentioned, not tried for, not even understood, but there somewhere all the time, of man's ultimate deliverance and freedom, a whisper of his homecoming among the stars. Nobody there was consciously aware of this, yet nearly everybody there,

beneath the surface of the mind—that crackling surface where the jokes exploded, because of the absurdity of this life of ours—somewhere in the deep communal recesses, in the dark river of racial being, felt all this, and was refreshed and restored by it.”

Nowhere else in the book is there anything remotely like this burst of eloquence and strong feeling. Here is passion, nobly evident. The music-hall show is close enough to the people to stand as an acceptable symbol of their desire for the full cultural enrichment of life, which can only come about by their gaining control of the system under which they work ; and it is thus for Priestley a symbol of that full freedom which, however many political tactics may be involved, goes beyond politics.

Naturally he comes from the North. I say ‘naturally’ because I think that in the North, and there only, is there still enough settled community-life, enough of man-to-man relationship, for the begetting of such virtues as Priestley’s in an English writer. It has often struck me, when I have been briefly able to get a glimpse of the way that a township of the North of England lives, that there one meets still what I am forced to describe as the Dickensian community. That community is a peculiar one, not to be found fully matured before Victorian days ; for in it is a special balance of patriarchy and honest self-respect, folk-memories of hospitality and pressure of industrial discord, an open-hearted warmth and the closed family-space. The enclosures of solid comfort and the moated castle-home provide an area in which monsters of egotism as well as the best lads in the world can be bred ; once the master of the house gets twisted there is nothing to stop his warping and his ruthless claiming of all within his moat as His Property. Hence the Dickensian type of eccentric, the nicest or the most abominable person possible in his wilful way. Such eccentrics still flourish, at least in comparison with the more unmoated south, in the townships of the North. Idiosyncrasy has its best chance to develop unchecked. In a play like *When we are Married*, Priestley draws on this rich background most directly—and the result is explosively funny and abounding in character-humours—but it pervades all that is best in his work in one way or another.

One encounters it from the outset, even in the early papers he wrote for the *Yorkshire Observer*. Amid the genial but not-so-outstanding essays one lights on sketches of town characters, and

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at once one encounters something masterful, showing a keen grasp of the typical word and the typical gesture. Priestley the Yorkshireman is the creative element in all the various works of Priestley the writer. A living sense of community has never deserted him, and of late years it has emerged with increased strength, to give him the important position he now holds as the one serious writer with a hold on the general public. Yorkshire gave him that sense of community; it also gave him the material for his vigorous characterization.

In his novel on the war-factory, *Daylight on Saturday*, the community-sense at last breaks right through. Reviewers, with their usual ineptitude, said that this was an excellent documentary work, altogether episodic, and no novel. On the contrary it is a very good novel of the collective kind, in which the factory is the prime character, but in which the centralizing image is effectively linked with the fates and developments of all the men and women whom we meet. Behind the complicated picture of the factory and its hands there is the clear-cut drama of the struggle on the technical level. The conflict between the warm-hearted but unruly works-manager and the chilly managerial-fascist is brilliantly defined, with full insight both into character and into the whole economic set-up environing the men.

Other novels have been written by writers with a thorough knowledge of conditions in war-factories and of the developments among the workers themselves. Priestley, while fully aware of the struggle on the managerial level, can only work with scattered intuition when he comes to the men and women who are running the machines; the struggle on the shop-steward level more or less eludes him. But because of his broad vigour, the variety of the types defined, the extent to which he can depict the uprooting war-impact on all kinds of people, his book is creatively alive, and the more minutely correct documentaries flatten out beside it. His fine ear for the spoken word, and his rich sense of situation, carry him triumphantly through.

His capacity to use the pictorial image is shown in the way in which he evokes the feeling of the factory with its cavernous, eerie light, and sustains it through the book. Consider his introduction of the factory and its site:

"... a sort of lunacy about the place. The very road outside the factory does not seem to belong to the country at all, and might

have been hastily unrolled there like a vast grubby carpet. The factory itself, when it stops being a toy village with painted trees and meadows, looks as if it had not been built there but brought from some distant city and dropped by the roadside, as if a giant child, using the whole countryside as its sand-pit, had picked the thing up and then idly poked it into position with an immense forefinger . . . ”

That is first-rate pictorial writing, and when a writer can write thus with his eye on things and people, he has the Dickensian visual clarity. Priestley again and again finds the effective pictorial phrase, whether for character—as when Mr. Blandford’s skin keeps tightening angrily over his nose till it seems it will snap—or for humour as when the aged chairman of the petty sessions :

“ . . . at regular intervals made a whinnying sound that ended with a very noisy throat-clearing. It was as if he were winding himself up to go on for another two or three minutes.”

But I must not too far particularize. I am not dissecting Priestley’s work for its strengths and defects, and then attempting to strike a carefully balanced judgment. I have set out to answer the questions of the first paragraph : to make a positive aim of interpretation and isolate the vital element which has given him his remarkable position in life and letters today. But without critically wandering, I must deal with one other aspect of his work which is relevant to my investigation : the use in his plays of Time-concepts.

Priestley’s plays are neat and careful craft-jobs. The tumult which at times irrupts valuably in his novels is kept well beyond the eaves of his theatre, though in the latter plays its noise is heard increasingly offstage. The problem he continually returns to is that of the future of Time.

This seems a very abstract problem for our feet-on-earth Yorkshireman. Why is he, otherwise so impervious to theoretical analysis, teased by doubts as to the reality of Time as measured on our clocks ; by attempts to envisage Time as a separate dimension, etc. ? Dunne and Ouspensky have supplied the instrument of enquiry, but the substance turns out to be Priestley’s own. Before I turn to that substance, let me mention that I have no faith in Dunne’s mathematics or Ouspensky’s rehashing of *Eternal Recurrence*. The foreseeing dreams, the dreams “ I have

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been here before," are merely a common type of dream in which a persistent unresolved conflict clings to certain imagery. Does that give us a clue to Priestley's obsession with the theme? I think so. But I make the suggestion by way of praise rather of dispraise, for it is precisely Priestley's bull-headed attack on this theme which shows his artistic and human seriousness.

Consider one of his early plays, *Dangerous Corner*, in which the Time-problem raises its worrying head. An ordinary middle class gathering is entangled with all kinds of dark conflicts and difficulties, which they are assiduously avoiding. The irritating novelist starts off a trail of thought which threatens to lead into the hidden thing. An unavailing effort is made to divert the conversation and out tumble all the ugly skeletons. Under the crust of respectability the corrosion of vice and dissatisfaction is revealed. But the play ends with the twist which carries all the characters back to the start again, and the man twiddling with the wireless finds his station and the dangerous corner of the conversation is turned. What does the play say? On the one hand, it says to the suburban audience: "All is not well with you, you are hiding a dark and dirty secret." But it also has a wider human scope. It says: "Life is for ever turning a corner, where chance and human impulse are forever colliding. Who can sort them out? Who can say where will ends and the impact of time and chance controls the lives of men?"

Jump ahead to a much more complicated time problem in *We have been here before*. The interfering intellectual has in a dream tapped what he thinks to be the fated future of some people; he turns up determined to see if intervention can change the course of things and save the husband from suicide and the lovers from misery. (The test is in fact no test at all, because it would be perfectly easy to argue that the dream was merely fated as the instrument of drawing the intellectual in for the purpose of diverting things the way they actually did go. But the emotional point of the play lies elsewhere.) The intellectual's intervention does not change things in one way—events go the same course; but in another way it does change them; the husband doesn't commit suicide, and the lovers aren't going to be unhappy—the fated cycle is broken by the intrusion of consciousness.

That is what Priestley is getting at. He wants to understand what it is that makes life something other than a blind cycle of



## J. B. PRIESTLEY

repetition. That is the problem behind all these dangerous corners, these crisis-moments of choice, when something new emerges in human relations. The crisis-moment liberates people for a new and fuller life, or breaks them with the vision of a reality which they cannot face.

Priestley is passionately concerned with this problem, and the time-thesis of Dunne has provided him with a convenient mechanism whereby he feels that he can artistically unfold his doubts and hopes. In this inner unresolved conflict of his he manages to get at grips with the pattern of our violently changing world. And in *They came to a City* he found a brilliant time-image in which to express what he was feeling about humanity's crucial moment of choice during the war. Logically considered, the play is a tissue of contradictions. The City is both Death and the Future. As Death it is the bourne from which no traveller returns; as the Future it is something fated, which will come about whatever we do or don't do. A number of people who have died or are on the brink of death hover round the City's entry, and some go inside. They are then confronted with the problem of choice—what is their reaction to the City and what are they going to do about it? Some want to die and go inside irretrievably; others want to go back to the life they know because they can't bear the future; others want to go back and preach the beauties of the future in order to bring it about. This summary shows what logical tangles the Dunne thesis has got Priestley into; what a confusion between fate and freewill, which no Ouspensky, however he has read the mathematics of the Platonic Great Year, or attempted the dance of Zarathustrian Eternity, can explain away.

But at the same time Priestley gets it over. In the last resort he resolves the illogicalities of thought within his intuition of the real struggle, of the real problem posited by the nature of crisis. And he has done this far better than any other of us. So where does the logical objection get us? Is it mere metaphysical puritanism? In part, yes, I think. Priestley has got away with it. His warm and strong sense of human conflict has so far enabled him to fill out and overwhelm the deficiencies in the logical movement of his thought, which is absolutely right in what it holds as the basic issue. But can he continue to do this indefinitely? If he is to keep on growing artistically with the expanding

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situation, as he has so far succeeded in doing, will he have to face out the logical weaknesses in his machinery for grasping the structure of the crisis-moment? Will he have to move towards a logic more adequate to the reality of a changing universe? (Note the dangerous subjective conclusion of the intellectual in *We have been here before*: "All events are shaped in the end by magic—the creative magic of our feelings, imagination and will. These are the realities—our feelings, imagination and will—and all our histories are then dreams.")

But that is not a question which matters to us here. I think that now enough has been said to provide some answer to the queries raised at the outset of this essay. I have not been concerned to make a precise evaluation of Priestley's faults and virtues, to give praise here and censure there. I have sought rather to isolate what it is in Priestley that has made him a great national figure and enabled him to become the spokesman of the new democratic forces unleashed by the war in the days after Dunkirk—a figure known as far afield as the wilds of Yugoslavia, to be an anti-fascist hero, The Mister Priestley. In the imagery and method of the music-hall we found his point of contact with the people of Britain and the popular tradition, and in his wrestling with abstractions of Time we found his struggle to grasp concretely the structure of a world in the convulsions of change. That will suffice.

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# Arthur Koestler



DEREK STANFORD

WE live, as J. F. Hendry has described it, in an age of "false history," in "the stuffy presence of a history composed of colossal and deliberate accidents, inorganic *faits accomplis*, and elephantine smash-and-grab. We are vulgar enough," he continues, "to confuse history with violence," and warns us that there is no history—"except the history of self-realization." There are signs that the vanguard of our generation is beginning to arrive at the same conclusion; and one of the writers most forcibly assisting this process of re-orientation is Arthur Koestler, a Hungarian novelist, who has published six books in this country.

Before we pass on to consider his work it is well to understand what attitude we are leaving as flotsam, what position we are evacuating. Briefly, I should like to express it as a trust in politics as the guarantee of happiness. The Nineteenth Century was the period of political faith *par excellence*. Universal suffrage, before this land obtained it, was thought to be the key to Utopia. Political action and power alone we know now to be the key to Pandora's box. The lid has been opened and like a million formations of wasps the bombers went visiting the centres of civilization, conferring upon them the inflammatory fruit of thinking too closely in political terms.

In the second half of the last century the people won their fight for political representation. They expected the era of democratic peace and prosperity to begin. Instead they received in 1914 their first taste of a democratic war; a war in which everyone had a part. Since the Armistice to the days of Munich there has been a growing feeling that politics could offer no redress; that the machinery of politics at present in use, both here and abroad, had shamefully abused the human trust, and hideously distorted the human cause. A time was coming in

which man began to feel that the inch-tape of expedience was no means by which to measure the rightness or wrongness of political action. Little by little we grew aware of the vast vat of chicanery which professional politicians hide under the epithet "policy"; and "diplomacy," another favourite word, was seen as a politer brother of the lie. What we should have condemned when considered ethically we praised or condoned in politics. If politics was the sphere in which the words "vice" and "virtue" suffered a mitigating change so that all actions were virtuous (in some degree) save those of one's enemy (which were wholly vicious it seemed), then away with politics! It was time to seek some other form of control.

When the Umbrella-Swastika War began there were many who woke from their *laissez-faire* (into which a hatred of politics as the mass-manufacture of betrayal had led them) to cry, in a moment of realization, though still without hope, the new slogan "Morality not diplomacy! Ethics in the place of politics!" Many of those who woke too late to the simple truth that collective relations must be conducted and judged in the same way as the relations between individuals, are now beyond the recall of the future. For ignorance we must pay as we pay for wrong-doing; for ignorance of evil is not innocence of it.

Of this new consciousness, Koestler is the novelist. Again and again in his books we are shown that when ethics (which measures the actions of individuals) is made into a collective criterion and called by the name of politics, the standard of judgement must remain the same. For politics is, rightly speaking, no more than ethics extended for plural usage.

Just as H. G. Wells, before the last war, in such novels as *The New Machiavelli*, pleaded for scientific planning in politics, so Arthur Koestler, in these days, makes a stand for the humanization of politics; for politics conducted not in the name of the State, the Race, the Church, or the Party, but in the name of the individual, the being who is both unit and entity; the creature demanding through the paradox of his make-up both personal independence and communal partnership, the animal whose nature possesses the opposite poles of freedom and responsibility.

The first of his works to be translated into English was the autobiographical *Spanish Testament*, published in 1937. Superficially one might describe it as a book-length piece of reportage.

## ARTHUR KOESTLER

The foreign correspondent in our time has become the equivalent of the Seventeenth Century freebooter. A suggestion of the picaresque hovers still about him, and we expect to find this figure subjected to the trials and tribulations of tragi-comedy, the particular sphere in which the existence of the adventurer as a heroic type has movement. True to this category, and true to our expectations, the author is arrested by Franco's forces for his sympathies with the Republican Government, and made to sample the hospitality of fascist prison life, until his release is secured by the pulling of influential English wires.

But this is the kind of estimation one receives gratis from the dust-cover. The value of the book has a meaning in recess, a kind of provocative by-product of thought remaining when the primary narration of facts is finished. While the author is imprisoned he learns he has been condemned to death by a court-martial held without his presence. The sense of the nearness of his end and his disappointment at the approaching defeat of the Popular cause produces in him a train of pessimistic ruminations. Too often the reformer of the past has gone at his task like a bull at a gate. In the enthusiastic onrush of his optimism he has failed to gauge those retrogressive forces, those enormous slag-heaps of apathy which hold up the wagons of Utopian pioneers. In failing to measure the dark side of his subject—this Jekyll-and-Hyde humanity—he misses the mark with his propaganda. He relies on aspirations which as yet must be carefully incubated before they can weather the harsh and adverse daylight of reality. The revolutionary of today must be fully acquainted with the aspects of pessimism. He must force himself to read every libel which philosophy can perpetrate against our species. When, and not before, he has taken the strain, tested the burden, is the time for him to speak, the time for him to act out of deepest darkness as one seeing stars from the depths of a mine. Reading *Spanish Testament*, written in a rare subjective kind of journalism, one gets the impression that depreciative factors in the process of human progress have been assessed. Toll has been taken but the struggle goes on.

*Spanish Testament* was followed in 1939 by a novel entitled *The Gladiators* which deals with the rebellion of Spartacus, known in Roman history as the Slave War. In this book the invoice of hope is matched by a crippling bill of disappointment. At first

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the gladiators, slaves and underdogs are successful in their venture against officialdom and tyranny. Spartacus founds a Sun State and allies with powerful enemies of the Empire. Rome is rotten with internal decomposition and armies commanded by lackadaisical generals are defeated by Spartacus. In spite of this the movement withers, its vital crusading spirit departs; the slaves tire of their intended Utopia, and desire severally to return to their homes. On the way they succeeded in beating forces of a sophist-minded Consul, but are finally massacred by the cohorts under Crassus, who lines the Appian Way to Rome with the crucifical anatomies of these pioneers of equality.

"Freedom," wrote Karl Marx, "is the recognition of necessity," yet the revolutionary who recognizes expedience, and in the name of expedience crushes opposition in a downright dictatorial fashion, imposes tyranny on those he would free.

"He who yearns for the Sun State and the Realm of Goodwill should not use political wiles and sinister facetious tricks" says one character, to which another replies, intimating that there is no short cut to Utopia. "The law of detours. None can act outside it. Everyone with a goal in front is forced on to its baleful track." The first speaker repudiates this. "Many a man," he says, "has strutted the road of tyranny, at the outset solely with the purpose of serving his lofty ideals, and in the end the road alone has made him carry on." Perhaps we are reminded of Huxley's "Grey Eminence," with its lesson that patience is the root of conscious virtue which cannot be seized by an act of violence. Spartacus muses somewhat in this manner when the slaves desire to depart and leave their Sun State where spiritual proportions of federal goodwill were never to be realized: "The century of abortive revolutions had been completed; others will come, receive the word and pass it on in a wrathful relay race through the ages; and from the bloody birth-pangs of revolution again and again a new tyrant will be born—until at last the groaning human clod would itself begin to think with its thousand heads; until knowledge was no longer foisted on it from outside, but was born in labour torment out of its own body, thus gaining from within power over the happening."

And so we are made to conceive of the history of freedom in terms of revolution, and see that this process of evolution is itself a proof of the democratic nature of revolt. Not until the



last member of society is ready and initiated into a love of liberty and an elemental unegoistic understanding of its nature can revolution ripen and become, not the destructive lightening, but the creative sunlight to the human fruit.

*Darkness at Noon*, his next novel, puts up for exhibition the features of the Soviet Man to test in the balance this latest product of model revolution for our century. The story is a kind of full-length debate, sometimes unspoken but always sensed as a basic opposition in thinking and feeling, between one of the Revolution's Old Guard (who has joined a group hostile to the Party as represented by the Moderator of Red non-conformity, Russia's Number One—Dictator Stalin) and a figure typical of the recent butchers and bureaucrats of orthodoxy before fraternity.

During the trial the Old Guard debates with a colleague of his early days who has stood by the Party through all its many tergiversations. The revolutionary of today, his colleague tells him, is a sort of "Satan . . . thin, ascetic, and a fanatical devotee of logic." He reads Machiavelli, Ignatius of Loyola, Marx and Hegel; he is cold and unmerciful to mankind, out of a kind of mathematical mercifulness. He is damned always to do that which is most repugnant to him; to become a slaughterer, in order to abolish slaughtering; to sacrifice lambs so that no more lambs may be sacrificed; to whip people with knots so that they may learn not to let themselves be whipped; to strip himself of every scruple in the name of a higher scrupulousness; and to challenge the hatred of mankind because of his love for it—an abstract and geometric love." Logic, the key to the lock of necessity may break in the hole through being too fine; for logic as well as sentiment may utterly imprison the human mind.

In the figure, Gletkin, who follows and takes over the trial of the Old Guard, we are shown the latest psychological type of the Communist totalitarian travesty. This new Neanderthaler is described as being "the iron civil servant" which the Total State demands. The capitalist democracies of the West possess the appropriate honour of having discovered the adding machine: appropriately, also, the Soviet can show us, in Gletkin, the automatic judiciary apparatus. Guilt, of course, in such cases is a matter of political predestination. The Old Guard is condemned to death. Partly persuaded of his own treason, which for him and his judges is to be defined as a penal dialectical error, he makes a

public recantation, but even until the moment of his death an "unknown factor," not to be detected, tracked or arrested by simple or complex logic, fills him with doubt as to the efficacy of Soviet policy with all its intrigues, purges and expedient re-orientations. The promptings of this "unknown factor" sound very reminiscent of the voice of conscience, the dictates of the "inner check," as others call it—that individual faculty we possess which recognizes harmony or discord. We may describe this book as being a debate between Ethical Man (singularly unselfish in his new property-less, "dispossessed" Left Wing aspect) and Machiavellian Man with his natural conscience overlaid by the cotton-wool of a synthetic State code of virtue.

In 1941 Koestler published another book of war and social reportage, called *Scum of the Earth* and autobiographical in form. He dedicated it to the memory of "the exiled writers of Germany who took their lives when France fell: Walter Benjamin, Carl Einstein, Walter Hasenclever, Irmgard Keun, Otto Pohl, Ernest Weiss."

Like Ilya Ehrenburg in his novel *The Fall of Paris* he makes an analysis of the cause and nature of internal corruption in France. Unlike the Russian he does not discover in any existing political party the hope of a national resurrection. (By which, of course, I do not mean the erection of the tricolour or any other chauvinistic rag.) "We had realised," he writes (speaking of the most sensitive and thoughtful of the old Communists) "that Stalinism had soiled and compromised the Socialist Utopia just as the Medieval Church had soiled and compromised Christianity; that Trotsky, although more appealing as a person, was in his methods no better than his opponent; that the central evil of his Bolshevism was its unconditional adaption of the tenet that the End justifies the Means; that a well-meaning dictatorship of the Torquemada-Robespierre-Stalin ascendancy was even more disastrous in its effects than a naked tyranny of the Neionian type; that all the parties of the Left had outlived their time; and that one day a new movement was to emerge from the deluge, whose preachers would probably wear monk's cowls and walk barefoot on the roads of a Europe in ruins." We may find echoed in these words the intimations to be found in Nicolas Berdyaev's *End of Our Time and Origins of Russian Communism*. "There is no such thing," writes Berdyaev, "in the history of mankind as a continual progress upward in a straight line, a progress which the

men of the nineteenth century believed in so firmly that they made a religion of it." Instead there are periods of development, period of stagnation, periods of crisis. Our age, he thought, was a catastrophic time, an apocalyptic period, a temporal pivot on which history was being turned to reveal a cataclysmic aspect. Such an age the Russian philosophers before the Revolution prophesized in their epithet "the end of history." Seeing history in the light of J. F. Hendry's definition, where history becomes the record of the politics of violence we can hope that such an age is about to dawn for all the darkness accompanying.

There are critics who have decried Koestler for his accounts of concentration camps, cross-examination by third-degree, trial by torture and other traits of our new totalitarian philanthropy. They discount his descriptions as being exaggerated, and accuse him in a lordly intellectual manner of sentiment-mongering and the propagating of bad-feelings against our enemies, who were, they maintain, merely to be impersonally beaten on the field. But Fascism and other brands of totalitarian existence, brown, black, or red, are also types of psychology, besides being a species of militant politics. Our task as active libertarians is to liquidate the germ as it dwells in the individual, as well as cleansing society en masse.

And again, if Koestler's accounts, by chance, should exceed the actual degree of brutality present it makes no difference; his writing remains justified. Suppose his whole chronicle of inhumanness to be fabrication. Well, then the book enters the category of fiction, and just as in fiction we find ourselves reacting to imagination's substitute world of reality, so we shall respond to Koestler's story with feelings of righteous indignation in the name of humanity and freedom. The exercise of these sentiments is one that we can well permit ourselves; there is very little chance of straining these particular emotive muscles. Suppose, on the other hand, Koestler's account to be veracious. In that case fact has for once succeeded in affecting us as powerfully as fiction.

The next novel *Arrival and Departure*, published in 1943, may be regarded as the continuation of the debate between the Political Man and Ethical Man which made up the drama of *Darkness at Noon*. Instead of listening to the briefs of the political sense (whose canon is necessity) and the ethical sense (whose canon is conscience) here, we witness the tug-of-

war between the dictates of psychology (whose canon is pleasure) and the plea of the spirit (whose proof and goal is glory).

Peter Slavek, an ex-martyr in the cause of revolution, leaves his party and his country, disillusioned with the doctrinization of its early Utopian vision. He travels to a neutral country and decides to fight for the Allies. Whilst waiting his passport, prior to sailing for England, he suffers an emotional calvary, and, when the girl Odette is gone, falls sick with a nervous breakdown. Sonia, a friend, and psychoanalyst, tells him his illness springs from guilt and irresolution. She traces his revolutionary zeal to a subconscious desire to expiate by hard endurance a sin committed in early childhood. She leaves for America, and he decides to follow; there to renew his enjoyment of Odette. At the last minute, already aboard the ship, the spirit finally wins the day, and he returns to receive his passport enabling him to enrol with the Allies. At the end of the book we leave him, dropped by a plane over enemy territory, intent upon some hazardous mission.

The questions raised by this story are of the most immediate and deepest importance. Sonia, the psychologist, suggests that all who oppose society—all reformers, philanthropists, etc.—do so out of a sense of guilt; neurosis. Acceptance, she preaches, is the secret. But acceptance of the basic conditions of life, of its primal physical strata, so to speak (something Jonathan Swift could never achieve), and the acceptance of the distortion of these conditions by those with a lust for power and wealth are not to be identified. Again, she forgets that this society, towards which Freud would urge acceptance, has likewise been developed through the work of neurotics; an architecture elaborated by those who found the need to build in order to forget an inner frustration.

We are left to wonder how a man can live for his cause and yet escape that sense of martyrdom which splits the personality upon the reef of ascetic denial. In this novel it is suggested that a popular collective cause and an individual conscience may somehow chime in harmony. The hero, who has left the ranks of the black-coated Civil Service Soviet State finds the synthesis of communal cause and individual conscience in fighting for the Allies. But the free-lance warrior who fights his own war, dropping with something like a *carte-blanche* over enemy territory and the libertarian lover of humanity, bound hand and foot in the antiquated red tape of the Allied Services, are two different

people. Slightly impossible as the ending remains, it seems that along a somewhat similar direction that we must discover the dual alliance of cause and conscience—communal and individual urges—in a freer, more generous political activity and grouping.

Koestler's most recent publication, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, presents a collection of his essays that have appeared in the past three or four years—mostly in British and American publications. The title of the book sums up succinctly the choice with which the author himself is constantly faced. It is perhaps characteristic of his questing and dissatisfied mind that so far his solution has been to remain balanced between the two alternatives, seeking yet a third which might compromise the positive elements of each of the other two.

Some of the ideas which Koestler holds regarding the function of the modern novel may be found by referring to an article *Les Tentations du Romancier* which appeared in *La France Libre*, and which is reprinted in *The Yogi and the Commissar*. He envisages the author as a figure looking at the world from behind a window. The first temptation which visits him—at a time when the scene grows riotous, when truncheons are drawn and stones thrown in the street—is to close the curtains and settle to work by artificial light. This is a return to the ivory tower. The second temptation which the author may feel is the urge to throw the window up, leap upon the sill and there participate in the struggle by exhorting the side he favours. This is the position of the propagandist.

With neither of these roles does Koestler agree. The author must master the art of mental balance; achieve by discipline a kind of nervous patience. He must learn how to stand before the open window; controlled though not indifferent, sympathetic but not a partisan. Beyond indicating this attitude which tries to occupy a strong-point in the very middle of the tension, Koestler does little to define and elaborate a practical look-out for the modern novelist.

He speaks, however, of a third temptation: that of selecting certain elements of life, separating them from their components, and subtracting them from life as a whole. Thus we have certain novels which act like eliminating prisms to the vari-coloured rays of reality. These master-pieces of fragmentation reveal to us a world where we find love without sexuality, labour without sweat, and vice versa.

Koestler's idea of the author is that of the omniscient mind.

Here is his summarized list of requirements : " The perfect novel demands, then, that the window be kept wide open, that the author possess full knowledge of all the principal themes and affairs (this will include statistics), the theories and ideas of his age (not forgetting the natural sciences). This knowledge he does not use directly, for that would be to present an encyclopædia in place of a novel. This knowledge plays, rather, the rôle of the catalyst ; the saliva which operates creative digestion."

The half-illustration which Koestler draws of this knowledge in use is hardly penetrating. He desires that the characters think their thoughts against the blackcloth of the age's history. This test-case character he christens Sylvia, and invites us to see her standing in the garden, a bunch of roses in her hand, waiting for the young man in question. Next he demands that the novelist shall let us know whether or not she has heard of such attractive features of our time as the splitting of the atom, Voronoff's apes, and concentration camps. If she has heard of them Koestler is impatient to learn her reactions.

Now it is possible that some few of us may find the blue-stocking more interesting as a mistress in life and fiction than the dumb blond of the suburbs. Yet in so far as Koestler desires to create common figures of the age, individuals created by our contemporary world, his informed and up-to-date awareness paradoxically works against him ; for unawareness of his own time, and apathy concerning its events is one of the chief characteristics in the make-up of the " little man."

Primarily, Koestler is a novelist of modern history and ideas, and like most artists he constructs and elaborates an aesthetic from his own art. These counsels, then, which he would apply unsoundly to the novelist as portrait-painter of the ordinary man, he acts on wisely in his own works, for here the *dramatis personae* are figures of the intelligentsia ; rebel, reactionary, refugee, and " detached " psychoanalyst.

With the new regimentation which has occurred in the Red ranks of the Left, more increasingly since the Russian Revolution, Koestler recognises that no single party or class today represents the interests of humanity (in so far as that implies the generous self-development of the individual). He describes how once the Third Estate was the vanguard of human emancipation ; how, nearly a hundred years later, the proletariat of Europe led by the intelligentsia represented the spearhead of the libertarian

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crusade. With power, however, comes stultification. The victorious lawyers of the French Revolution became Louis-Philippe's pot-bellied good citizens, and the encyclopædic Prometheans of the proletariat were soon magically changed into dogmatic clerks of the Red bureaucracy; "men with iron wills and wooden heads."

Koestler sees well that a show of scarlet banners with hammers and sickles does not make a revolution. When a State or a Party adopts towards its members a repressive attitude, ironing out initiative and innovation then that body, for all its fire-breathing clap-trap, has become a reactionary organization. For what, after all, is the watchword of reaction other than the cry of "Conformity"?

Let me, at this point, define the spirit of the revolution as being the qualitative seed of change in the quantitative soil of status-quo. Now to the nature of conformity one opposes the idea of individuality. Koestler is, then, keen to examine the role of the intelligentsia as being the sole remaining champions of individuality. In an essay entitled *The Fraternity of Pessimists* he sees that role as being the one of acting as a kind of Observer Corps on the coast-line of contemporary culture; small figures perched on the cliffs of history looking through their critical telescopes for the first sign of favourable shapes emerging from the mists of the future. They will watch and be ready at a moment's notice to raise the starting cry and ignite the beacons.

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# Federico García Lorca



ARTURO BAREA

IT HAS become an intellectual convention to name Federico García Lorca among the few modern symbolist poets of universal or European significance, though not more than a fraction of his work has been translated from the Spanish. Certainly he is the only one of modern Spanish lyrical poets to have entered the consciousness of non-Spanish readers of poetry outside the narrow circles of the initiated, as he has been the only one of them to have the same magic attraction for illiterates and highbrows in his own country.

Yet though easy to love—and to imitate superficially—Lorca is most difficult to translate. His language is not built on intellectual attitudes, allusions and concepts common to European civilization through its classical, humanist and romantic inheritance. It is built on images derived from his direct sensual experience and formed by Spanish popular, as well as poetical, tradition. His poetry has its realistic core, firmly bound to his Spanish surroundings by his faithful observation of the tangible surface of things, and it has its imaginative radius of action—as Lorca himself called it—where the “real” is transformed into an “imagined” world none the less real, with a life and laws of its own and with a heightened, changed significance.

The realistic core helps the Spanish reader or listener to understand Lorca's symbolist poetry, while the beauty and stirring strangeness of the unreal, imaginative world will make the non-Spaniard able to feel something of the concrete world beneath. Again, Lorca's transformation of reality makes Spaniards realize more clearly and strongly than before the main-springs of their life, while the same impact of fundamental human things may reach non-Spaniards on the plane of Lorca's imagery, leaving the real world linked to it only dimly perceived.

The strength of Lorca's lyric lies precisely in this sustained



double vision of the real and the symbolic world. As Stephen Spender put it in his essay *Lorca in English* :

"His peculiar power is to build up a fantastic world out of these images, which seems to have an inner consistence and logic, as though it was related to, yet independent of, the real world. One is aware often in his poems of a double picture : the reality on which his poetry is drawing, and, superimposed above this reality, an independent, unreal picture."

There is, however, another most important element in this "peculiar power." Lorca conceived the reality on which he was drawing, not through an analytical mental process, but visually, sensually, as a child comes to know its immediate world in terms of colour, noise, warmth, light, hardness and smell. Lorca is a sensual poet, however abstract some of his symbols may seem.

And he is above all Spanish. The reality to which his images are related is the reality which the solitary child Federico, immobilized and over-sensitized by an early illness, had taken in through his receptive senses and filled with inner meanings : the Spain of rural Andalusia. He reached at the simple human forces—love, death, pain, joy, fear, courage, loneliness, longing—through the objects his Spanish eyes saw and through the sensations he shared with his people. To put it paradoxically, Lorca is truly universal when he is most truly Spanish.

In 1927, when official Spain celebrated the 300th anniversary of the death of Luis de Góngora, the greatest and most obscure of Spanish Baroque poets, Federico García Lorca gave the memorial lecture at Granada. In re-assessing Góngora's imagery and in expounding the process by which Góngora came to create his metaphors and conceits, Lorca explained, by implication, his own creative process and the principles of poetical imagery as he saw them. (This was at a time when he had finished the work which was to make him popular, the *Romancero Gitano*, though it had not been published in print, and when he was searching for new forms of expression and transmission.)

"A poet must be a Professor of the five bodily senses," Lorca said in his lecture. "Of the five senses, in the following order : sight, touch, hearing, smell, and taste. To command the most perfect images, he must open doors of communication between all of the senses . . . The metaphor is always ruled by vision, though at times by a sublimated vision ; it is the vision, too,

which limits a metaphor and gives it reality. It does not permit a shadow to blur the outlines of an image it has seen clearly drawn. . . . All images are born in the visual field. . . . The metaphor links two antagonistic worlds through an equestrian leap of imagination."

This, then, was Lorca's conception of imaginative poetry: however bold a metaphor, or the images which went into its making, it had to have a kernel of sensual experience, of realistic observation. He obeyed his own rule most faithfully; or, perhaps, he came to formulate this intellectual rule because his creative process was of that peculiar nature. As he started from the objects in his "visual field," he observed attentively how the people saw, touched, heard, smelt and tasted the things within reach of their and his senses. He observed them transforming their common reality into similes and images of their own, from which he, the poet, could learn, on which he could draw.

Lorca made this clear in his analysis of Góngora, when he said:

"A poetical image is always a transference of meaning. A language consists of images, and that of our people has an immense wealth of them. . . . To call one sweetmeat "Heaven's Bacon" and another "Nun's Sigh" is to create two delightful and yet acute images; the same with the expression "Half-orange" for a cupola, and so forth. In Andalusia, popular imagery reaches astounding depths of penetration and sensitiveness, it achieves transformations much like Góngora's. Thus they call a deep watercourse that flows slowly through the fields "an ox of water," to indicate its volume and mighty, harnessed strength. And I have heard a farmer from Granada say 'The rushes love to grow on the tongue of the river.' These are two images created by the people, closely corresponding to Góngora's style."

Góngora, however, had cultivated the erudite and recondite metaphor, although he loved to give it the counterfoil of those flashes of sensual imagery to which Lorca referred. In speaking of the roots of poetical images in the popular Andalusian vision, he was concerned with his own imagery rather than with Góngora's. Even the illustrations from folklore, which he meant to apply to Góngora, belong to his own work. For in one of the poems of the *Romancero Gitano*, in the "Ballad of the Spell-

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bound," (*Romance del Emplazado*) there occur the following lines :

The dense water oxen  
rush at the boys  
who bathe in the moons  
of their wavy horns.

It will happen at night, in the dark,  
in the magnetized mountains,  
where the water oxen drink  
the rushes, dreaming.

Lorca must have fallen in love with the two popular images, that of the slow, strong water oxen and that of the rushes being fond of the licking tongue of the rivers (the oxen), because, not content with having transformed them into his own poetical images, he had to define them intellectually afterwards. He had seen the water and the rushes through the eyes of his people ; he had made the picture his own ; and then he " threw doors of communication " wide open. The water oxen live their life, parallel to the life of the water, yet on another plane : they strike at the bathing boys with their horns—rippling waves which a silvery light turns into shining moon sickles—and at night, in the quiet darkness, they are dreamily lapping at the rushes with their tongues. Here, surely, Lorca obeys his own postulate : born in the visual field, limited and clearly confined by the underlying observation, the metaphor links the antagonistic worlds of " inanimate " and " animated " life. In that magical, magnetized world, the spell-bound gypsy of the ballad lives in an unreal reality where everything is as it must be : no escape from his sleepless contemplation of the symbols of his own appointed death, stinging-nettles, cowbane and quicklime prepared to engulf his body, until death comes on the day set by the spell, freeing him from his " solitude without rest." Only then the poem returns to the plane of reality :

Men walked down the street  
to look at the spell-bound  
who riveted to the wall  
his solitude at rest.

And the sheet, impeccable,  
in hard, Roman lines,  
gave poise to the death  
with its straight squares.

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There are passages in Lorca's poetry in which the image is so condensed, the visual impression on which it draws so strictly limited to Spanish life, that it sounds fantastic and arbitrary in translation, "surrealist," while it is a severely constructed, lucid symbol of a general experience. This is an example :

There is no one who in giving a kiss  
does not feel the smile of the faceless people,  
no one who, touching a new-born child,  
can forget the motionless horse skulls.

The thought and mood of the verse is obvious enough : the implacable nearness of death felt at the touch of beloved, living flesh. The grin on the jaws of a death-head—the " smile of the faceless people "—is one of the oldest symbols for the vanity of life ; spiritual exercises as universal as the Catholic Church itself make the mental association between warm, kissed lips and the hidden skull underneath almost inescapable. The obsession with death (" There is *no one* who does not feel—*no one* who can forget . . .") is Lorca's personal expression of the ever-present familiarity with death bred into Spaniards. But what about the " motionless horse skulls ? " Are they the skulls in one of Salvador Dali's landscapes ? A purely personal symbol, a frightening nightmare ?

Many Spaniards will recognise the concrete vision behind this condensed image, because it has been part and parcel of their life. Two or three miles from innumerable villages in the Castilian and above all, the Andalusian plains there is a ravine in which the bleached skulls of horses, mules and donkeys are piling up, a mass grave of domestic animals, visited by carrion birds. The men of those villages, and people who came to live there with relatives (like myself), usually have passed through various stages of an almost philosophical relationship with those grave-yards. As little children, they may have lived in terror of the skulls ; as growing boys, they may have tried to get rid of their childish fear by playing pranks with the bones ; as men, they may have thrown into the pit the body of a horse of whom they had been fond, and they may have mumbled the traditional words : " And that's how we all end ! " To everyone who has the picture of such a ravine at the back of his memory, Lorca's dark phrase of the " motionless horse skulls " will become translucent and moving with the restrained power of an old, shared emotion.

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One of the most famous ballads in the *Romancero Gitano*, the "Somnambulant Ballad," recited almost to the point of becoming hackneyed by Spaniards who intoxicate themselves with its words, starts with four lines the sound of which is sheer music, while the meaning is elusive. Hearers or readers are prone to take those lines as a mere sound-painting of the "somnambulant" mood. In this case, it is important to give the text of the original as well as a translation :

Verde que te quiero verde.  
Verde viento. Verdes ramas.  
El barco sobre la mar  
y el caballo en la montaña.  
Green—I want you green.  
Green wind. Green boughs.  
The ship on the sea  
and the horse in the mountains.

The translation is, for once, rigidly literal. The music of the Spanish turns on the sound of the word for green—*verde*—with its two syllables, and on the change of stress at the end of the third line ; in other words, there is nothing of this particular music in the English translation. I imagine however (though I cannot be sure of it in the way an English writer would be sure in one form or other) that something of the simplicity and mystery of the original comes through the English words: green—wind—boughs—ship—sea—horse—mountains. They could not be simpler, these words, either in Spanish or English. Yet behind their puzzling bareness there lies a complex, very definite picture, condensing the emotions which carry the action.

This is the action : the gypsy girl, who lives in the hot yellow plain, in her father's house, is in love with a smuggler whose trade sends him riding through the mountains to the sea (where the ship carrying contraband comes to the shore at night) and back again, eluding the Civil Guards. She has been waiting for him in vain during many nights, leaning over the rail of the roof terrace and staring at the hills, into the moon, into the green weeds of the cistern-pool below which throws a green, faint sheen back into her face. Her longing for him becomes an obsession and it widens, to embrace everything that stands for him : the green sea, the green mountains, the moist wind, the richness,

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gentleness and fulfilment of a lush green world where there will be no more thirst and frustration. In the end, when she only lives entranced in that longed-for green world, when

the things are looking at her  
and she cannot look at them,

she throws herself into the cistern-pool, following the green glow. Her lover, mortally wounded by his pursuers, drags himself to her house to die there "decently in the bed," but he is too late. She is dead.

The melodramatic part of the action, the story of the wounded smuggler, theme of innumerable folksongs in all languages, is told mainly through the dialogue between the two gypsies, the smuggler himself and the father; it uses the dramatic similes and flowered idioms of Andalusian folklore in a poetically heightened form. Thus, the father describes the death wound in the breast of his friend and tries to tell him of the suicide of his daughter by saying :

Three hundred dark roses  
are spread on your white shirt.  
Your blood smells and oozes  
around your sash.  
But I am no more myself  
and my house is no more my house . . .

Here, the roots of the poetry are in the reality of the folksong, the images are popular images. But intertwined with and superimposed on this part of the action runs the "somnambulant" story, the inner action condensed in the first four lines with the "green" dream world and the flashlight picture of the smuggler, ship on the sea, horse in the mountains. The dream tension is carried on through the images of the landscape :

Green—I want you green.  
Big rimefrost stars  
come with the shadow fish  
that opens the path of dawn.  
The fig-tree rubs its belly  
with the rasp of its branches  
and the mountain, a thieving cat,  
bristles its angry thorns.

This is, surely, a perfect picture of the hour before dawn. The low stars which begin to grow and glitter frostily, the musty

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shadow which rises in the east, the sudden chill wind in the trees, the jagged outline of the hills standing black before the pallid sky, are each transformed into a picture as sensually direct as though a child had told it in one of its monologues. The gypsies in the Andalusian plain may have used each of the images in their tales. But the poem has woven them into a pattern which opens those "doors of communication" between the senses and supports the double reality, that of the real world and that of the dream world. And it is the imagined reality which tells the inner story, the story of longing for the "green world," which never ends, not even when the gypsy girl is floating on the green surface of the pool, in the last cold glint of the moon, while the brutality of the outer world knocks at the door :

An icicle of moonlight  
sustains her on the water.  
The night grew intimate  
like a little square.  
Drunken Civil Guards  
were beating on the door.  
Green, I want you green.  
Green wind. Green boughs.  
The ship on the sea.  
And the horse in the mountains.

Even before the publication of the *Romancero Gitano*, in which Lorca had used his dream-gypsies as an objectivized link between his concrete world grasped through the senses and his visionary world grasped through symbols, he had entered a period of crises in his poetical work. The echo of those crises rings through the challenging words which he devoted to Góngora's departure from popular poetry to a new, ornate, deliberately unreal style :

"What reasons may Góngora have had for launching his lyrical revolution? Reasons? . . . They have to be found not in history, but in his soul . . . The need for a new kind of beauty, and the boredom which the poetical production of his time caused him, developed in him an ætute, nearly unbearable critical sensitiveness. He began almost to hate poetry. . . . He was no longer able to create poems smacking of the old Castilian style. . . . All the dust of Castile weighed on his soul and on the folds of his seer's mantle. . . . Tired of Castilians and of 'local colour' . . ."

Lorca, tired of being cast into the role of an Andalusian 'local colour' poet, ran away from his paralyzing success. He was never more to use the convention of his gypsy ballads. As though to find himself, he fled from the old associations and went into the desert: it bore the name of New York, and he found himself involved in a personal struggle against an alien civilization. His despair at a mass misery, a mass enjoyment and a mass indifference, such as he had never known in his own country, merged with his desperate search for new forms of poetic expression.

He saw and felt as acutely as ever, but what he saw and felt was disjointed and incomplete. How to transmit it? He himself had said: "No one who was born blind can be a poet capable of shaping objective images, for he will have no idea of the natural proportions. The blind will do better in the field of mysticism, devoid of real objects, but swept by the strong gusts of wisdom." Now he was as a blind man in that strange industrialized world. He found no way to the inner self of the people he met, and began to doubt whether there was any live substance under their clothes; he had not even begun to take in the proportions of their world. When he attempted to express his experience in poetic language, he found purely subjective images, or images drawn from his Spanish reality, but distorted by the alien objects which they had first to fit and then to transmute. The style of surrealism—of subjective symbols following from dream-like mental associations—became a new vehicle for him, though it was still shot through with the traditional Spanish rhythms. In the work which was the outcome, the *Poet in New York*, the images which are least obscure to the Spanish reader are those recapturing a vision from Lorca's old life, while their intellectual mood may be far more accessible to non-Spaniards than to Spaniards.

In August, 1929, Lorca wrote his "Poem of the Solitude in Columbia University." (In the years 1929-30, he lived as a "student" in Columbia University, though he had to make himself understood mainly through his music—he never learnt English.)

The word *soledad*, solitude, carries a heavy load of traditional associations, literary and popular: the contemplative poems of the mystics, the exercises in cerebral poetry inspired by them (Góngora wrote "Soledades") and on the other hand, the gypsy



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songs called "Soleá," despairing cries from the deep, transmuted and condensed in the religious symbol of the sorrowing Virgin who has lost the Son, in Spanish called "La Soledad," short for Our Lady of the Solitude.

Lorca had used the *Soled* rhythm and pattern in his *Poem of the Cante Jondo*. Though he had transformed the words, they had to be spoken as if to an inaudible accompaniment on the guitar. In one of his two "*Soled*" songs the loneliness of life speaks through the landscape; each of the lines consisting of a single word represents a long, quivering, wailing note of the *Cante Jondo* :

Old  
earth  
of the oil lamp  
and the sorrow.  
Earth  
of the eyeless death.  
and the arrows.  
(Wind on the paths,  
breeze in the grove.)

The other "Soleá" poem puts the lonely woman into the wind on the paths :

Wrapped in black cloaks,  
she thinks that the world is tiny  
and that the heart is boundless.  
Wrapped in black cloaks.  
She thinks that the gentle sigh  
and the cry, too, disappear  
in the rush of the wind. . . .

At another stage of his poetical development, Lorca invested one of the mythical gypsies of his *Romancero Gitano* with dread and love of solitude.

Soledad Montoya, the impassioned woman—  
yellow copper, her flesh  
smells of horse and of shadow—

is tortured by the "black sorrow" which makes her a stranger to herself, so that she wanders about in the early dawn, seeking

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"her gaiety and her self." That "sorrow of the gypsies" was to Lorca

clean and ever lonely sorrow,  
oh sorrow of a hidden river  
and of a distant daybreak.

But in New York, Lorca himself was tortured by the black sorrow of loneliness without being able to cleanse himself in wind, sun and sea, without being able to feel the same wild, animal despair in other beings he could understand. His "solitude" poems consist of broken pieces of reality and broken pieces of images. Neither his vision of reality is complete and consistent, nor the unreal world of imagery which he builds above that reality.

He comes back from a walk—the title of the poem is "Return from a Walk"—and feels only that he is one of many living things destroyed by a senseless, vacuous sky. He is "murdered by the sky," together with the "child of the white egg face" and the "butterfly choked in the inkpot." There is no transmutation of his experience and emotion on to another plane. His poetry is confronted with the shock, and immobilized. But the echo of the distant *Cante Jondo* wail is in the first and last line of the poem, the outcry: Murdered by the sky!

Then Lorca tries to find shelter in his own childhood and recalls what his "eyes of 1910" had seen and not seen:

Those eyes of mine in nineteen hundred-and-ten  
did not see the dead being buried,  
or the feast turn to ashes for someone weeping at dawn,  
or the heart tremble, curled on itself like a seahorse.

The things his boyish eyes had seen were clearly defined by sight and sound, they all had their life:

an incomprehensible moon lighting up in the corners  
pieces of dried lemon under the hard black of bottles.  
Those eyes of mine on the neck of a filly,  
on the pierced bosom of sleeping Santa Rosa,  
on the roofs of love, with their moans and cool hands,  
on a garden where cats were chasing the frogs.

In the New York his eyes of 1929 take in, he can see nothing but

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an all-devouring vacuum. His solitude is hopeless :

Ask me nothing. I have learnt that the things  
seeking thcir course meet with their void.

The pain of nothingness is in the unpeopled air  
and in my eyes beings without nakedness under their  
clothes.

This sets the keynote to the poems of the whole work. In a wilderness of bizarre, or cruelly realistic, similes and symbols, the poet is seeking his "gaiety and his self" like Soledad Montoya. He battles his way through the alien world as though through a jungle; he calls it a Senegal with machinery. He is searching other human beings not hollowed out by that mechanized civilization; he takes refuge with children and tries to recapture with them his "lost voice," his lost vision. Then comes the time when he believes to have found a savage, passionate and redeeming life in the negroes of Harlem.

Lorca never knew the negroes of New York as individuals or as a community with bitter social and personal problems. He saw them with the eyes of a Spanish child, as splendid, glistening bodies moving like panthers, strong enough to send the skyscrapers crashing. Those fantastic beings, mockingly disguised in the uniform of hotel porters, belonged to his infantile dream world.

The Spanish children of my generation, which was also Lorca's, had still seen negroes walking about in the streets of cities where they had come in the retinue of wealthy planters or defeated generals driven out of the West Indies or the Philip-pines. The mothers of those children, like mine, had still told them thrilling, gruesome stories of negro riots, conjuring up pictures of tropical green and smoking ruins bespattered with blood.

Those are the negroes of Lorca's *Ode to the King of Harlem* :

That night, the king of Harlem with the hardest of spoons  
scooped out the eyes of the crocodiles  
and spanked the monkeys' bottoms.

With a spoon.

Negroes, negroes, negroes, negroes,  
the blood has no door in your blackness beyond your  
mouth,

there is no blush. Furious blood beneath the skins,

alive on the thorn of the knife . . .

That is the blood that comes, that will come,  
over the roofs and terraces, everywhere,  
to burn the clorophyll of fair-haired women . . .

In Lorca's chaotic poems of his New York, the purely subjective and almost incomprehensible symbols smother the images linked to a clear sensual experience—the Spanish images. His vision (vision in the sense of spiritual sight) is powerful, and he shares it with all rebels against a civilization in which the single being is lost in a void crowded with numbers. But his vision in the other sense, that of visual clarity, is blurred. The sensual core of the image is not complete, and the metaphor therefore lacks reality and life. Lorca was fighting to recover the roots of his creative power.

He gave characteristic titles to the last two sections of his New York cycle: "Flight from New York—two valses towards civilization" and "The poet comes to La Habana." He stayed in Cuba as though in a voluntary quarantine, knowing that he had to go home so as to regain his unity of vision and clarity of form. In his own work, he had tested the truth of his definition of imaginative poetry: it needed the direct vision, the sound, smell, touch and taste of a reality accessible to his senses and mind. He realised how completely he was a Spaniard.

Lorca's lyrical work after his return to Spain grew from the old roots, but his form of expression and his range had changed. No more refuge in a new medium and a deliberately modern style; no more use of "local colour" and symbolic gypsies as a vehicle: he went back to his sources in the people and in Spanish tradition, but gave them new shape in applying them to his own spiritual battles. The theme which overshadows all others in this last stage of his poetical development is death, the underlying theme of all his previous work. But he has dropped the disguise of the gypsy death, the visionary painting of apocalyptic catastrophes in the hostile city of New York. Ceaselessly, his poems grapple with the Spanish death obsession in a direct encounter.

In one of the lectures he had given in Cuba, before a public of Spanish language and intellectual traditions, he had defined this obsession in the images of death created by the Spanish people and alive in his poems:

"The blade, and the wheel of the cart, and the knife, and the

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prickly beard of shepherds, and the bald-headed moon, and the fly, and the dank cupboards, and rubble, and the images of Saints covered in lace, and the quicklime, and the stabbing outline of eaves and bay-windows, they all have in Spain the minute grasses of death, associations and voices which an alert mind will perceive, which recall to our memory the frozen air of our own departure."

Those visions, absorbed through the eyes and through all the senses, are those which Lorca could see clearly and transpose into art only in his Spain.

In New York, he had seen death, destruction and blood in a welter of half-shaped thoughts and discordant words :

That is the blood that comes, that will come  
over the roofs and terraces, everywhere,  
to burn the chlorophyll of fair-haired women,  
to groan at the foot of beds, before sleepless basins,  
and to be shattered in a dawn of tobacco and vile brass.

Five years later, in his *Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias*, the vision is clarified and beautifully shaped :

And already his blood comes singing,  
singing across marshes and meadows,  
gliding off chill, stiff horns,  
reeling soulless through the mist,  
stumbling on a thousand hooves  
like a long, dark, woeful tongue,  
to gather in a pool of agony  
by the Guadalquivir of the stars.  
Oh white walls of Spain !

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# Dorothy Sayers



PAUL FOSTER

"TAKE the Book," says the coroner in *The Nine Tailors*, "truth . . . truth . . . truth," thus striking at the heart of every detective story; for the problem of the detective is to disentangle the truth lying behind appearances, and the task of the detective-story writer is to create both elements of this problem, the misleading appearances and the truth which eludes and explains them. Miss Sayers must be considered primarily as a writer of detective fiction, perhaps as the greatest writer in this *genre* that has yet appeared; for though she has developed other interests, yet her fame still consists primarily in being the creator of the detective Lord Peter Wimsey. And therefore the study of Miss Sayers as a writer must hinge upon the consideration of this grand human problem of the elucidation of the truth.

It might be maintained of course that it is comparatively easy for the writer of *fiction* to invent both the truth, the appearances, and the disengagement of the one from the other. But that is not so; the recorder of an actual crime whose solution has, it may be, been achieved need only put down what has happened; and anyway there are few cases where we know, beyond possibility of doubt, that the truth has been arrived at, even though somebody hangs for it. But the writer has to satisfy more than Scotland Yard, judge and jury; the fiction writer has to give satisfaction to his or her public, who must be able to say as the solution emerges from the last chapter "Of course, why didn't I see it before?" The fiction writer in fact has to satisfy the reader with the whole of the mass of appearances as the evidence points to the guilt of one possible criminal after another, and then supremely satisfy with the dénouement. Satisfy, how? By making each successive stage of the book humanly probable or possible. The task of the creator of a detective story—omitting that is, the sort of detective novel which hinges upon mysterious Chinamen, poisonous spiders or the unusually degraded—is to state

and elucidate the problem within the boundaries of normal human behaviour.

When Conan Doyle created Sherlock Holmes he did an extraordinary thing—he established a norm for a whole class of fiction. Inevitably or not, nearly every great writer of detective fiction has, since that beginning in Baker Street, made his stories hinge around the figure of the detective, the great detective. And the great detective in fiction must show certain qualities, qualities which are concerned with the twin aspects of the problem, the appearances, and the truth lying behind them. He must possess an exquisite appreciation of detail, hence the crawling about with the magnifying glass, never done better than when Peter Wimsey examines some shreds of material found with the corpse in *Whose Body?* “Tell me, do you think these tiny threads are long enough and strong enough to hang a man?” And he must possess a more passive quality of mind, one which responds to a deeper layer of reality than that of appearances, one which intuitively tingles in response to an explanation lying deeply hid. “Lord Peter reached home about midnight . . . Something was jiggling and worrying in his brain. ‘Somewhere,’ said Lord Peter to himself, ‘somewhere I’ve got the key . . . I know I’ve got it, only I can’t remember what it is.’” The minutiae have to be taken *exactly* as they are; the immediate probabilities may not fit them, and they must not be *twisted* to fit those probabilities; when the ultimate truth emerges the specks of dust, the blood-groupings, the unexplained footprints, the little scraps of writing will fall into their place, but not until then. The mind of the great detective is, then, ambivalent; it must possess that rare combination of the exact appreciation of detail with a wide intuition of underlying reality.

But nobody gives what they have not got to give. The creator of a remarkable figure must be still more remarkable herself. One recalls the appalling failure of the late Hugh Walpole when, in *The Cathedral*, he makes the Canon’s sister tell her brother that he is the cleverest man she has ever met. Thereafter the Canon could not be allowed to say more than “It occurs to me . . .” But not so in the detective story; the central figure must be on the stage nearly all the time, and the complexities of the plot, with the ingenuity of their solution, must be at the full disposition of every reader. The detective-story writer cannot



conceal, ultimately, anything, and by his brilliance we judge him. It follows, therefore, that Miss Dorothy Sayers, in creating Lord Peter Wimsey, has revealed herself as a woman of quite exceptional intelligence in the appreciation both of exact technique and of deep-lying human truths.

Let us examine for a moment some of her *dramatis personae*<sup>1</sup>. The central figure, Lord Peter Wimsey, the younger son of a duke, musician, connoisseur, historian, cricketer, to name only a few of his accomplishments, is her development of the Sherlock Holmes theme. But let us look at some of the Doctor Watsons. They are by no means as bone-headed as their original. Charles Parker of Scotland Yard, Wimsey's brother-in-law,<sup>2</sup> shows a marvellous capacity for the acquisition and assimilation of detail. He does the hard work of checking up, as for instance in *Strong Poison*, when the packet of bismuth has to be tracked down, or the nussing telephone directory in *Murder Must Advertise*; this detail-gathering is intensely satisfying to pursue in Miss Sayer's books; London, England, are combed to produce the world behind the brilliantly lit loophole of the murder-scene; pubs, churches, buses, time-tables,<sup>3</sup> manicurists, burglars, solicitors, yield up their positive or negative meed of detail to fill in the background, the wide human background of the human event. That is largely the work of Chief-Inspector Parker, and it may be noted that the police in Miss Sayers' books are not held up to ridicule to the advantage of the amateur detective. A tendency to do this with Inspector Sugg in *Whose Body?* is checked in later novels, and Inspector Sugg retires to a house near Leamholt, whence he takes a benevolent interest in Wimsey's handling of the *Nine Tailors* mystery. Then there is Wimsey's valet, Bunter; imperturbable,<sup>4</sup> ex-batman, almost impossibly foresighted—witness his anti-pressman provisions in *Busman's Honeymoon*, or the hotel bedroom scene in *Clouds of Witness*—expert in the development of photos, sometimes of "deceased persons in an imperfect state of preservation," grandiloquent, but a master of the art of extracting information. Fascinating is the technique by which the cook, the parlour-maid, the valet, are induced to yield up their little unconscious store of evidence to that gentlemanly Mr. Bunter. Harriet Vane, whom Wimsey rescues from the gallows in *Strong Poison*, protects and aids in *Have His Carcase*, aids and wins in *Gaudy Night*, weds and honeymoons with in *Busman's*

*Honeymoon*, writes, it is true, detective stories which Miss Sayers amuses herself by making caricatures of her own; but she is a woman of courage, honesty, intellectual integrity and generosity. Miss Simpson, a fantastic spinster, rivals Queen Victoria in the underlinings of her letters; but she is a resolute sophisticated realist, "a tough, thin, elderly woman, with a sound digestion and a militant High Church conscience." The Watsons are admirable foils, but by reason of a contrasted intelligence, not by a crude antithesis of stupidity and omniscience. And round them circulates a vast world of rounded characters, taximen, lock-keepers, butlers, financiers, clergymen, nurses, typists, char-women, dons, duchesses, whose conversation, reactions, and backgrounds fill out the splendid canvas of her stories. Added to these human riches, Miss Sayers gives us our full measure of sheer detection. The ciphers are unravelled in full on the page; the rival hypotheses are discussed with a sinewy closeness of reasoning in which Mr. Rex Stout is her sole rival, and in the majority of her novels Miss Sayers displays the mastery of some new technique for our enlightenment. The art of change-ringing in the *Nine Tailors*; water-colour painting in the *Five Red Herrings*; publicity in *Murder Must Advertise*; the detection of synthetic from natural poison in *The Documents in the Case*; the possibility of killing by introducing a bubble into the bloodstream in *Unnatural Death*; the results of haemophilia in *Have His Carcase*; the list could be extended. In all these things Miss Sayers displays the equipment of a brilliant and humane intelligence.

But she has reserved her finest imaginative powers for the creation of her *chef d'oeuvre*, Peter Wimsey. Here she has created her Magnanimous Man. Aristotle, in whom she is deeply versed, did not make a very attractive character of his supremely-minded man; and Miss Sayers' paragon exhibits some weaknesses. His code of sexual behaviour errs on the generous side; he is apt to show off his intellectual powers; he wears a monocle; he draws and drops his final g's; he shrinks from responsibility which his rank and intelligence impose upon him. But he is a brave man, an over-sensitive child bludgeoned by the Great War into shell-shock and horror of taking command, a generous, sensitive, fine, observant aristocrat full of charm, hospitable, exquisite in dress and taste, but still part of the general background

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of English life, happy walking through the roots after partridges, talking to the pub-keeper, singing in the village choir, taking tea with spinsters, playing cricket. And heavens, is he versatile! Much too versatile for our credulity really, for he is an expert Bach player, boxer, historian, aristotelian, diplomat, hunter, cricketer, wine connoisseur, incunabulist, criminologist—the list is not exhaustive. He strains our belief, but one must admit that Miss Sayers produces a fair amount of evidence that she is all these things herself, and all these things subserve the grand underlying purpose of the revelation of the truth. For the truth is not simple: the enlightened mind is aware that the obvious short-cut solutions do not conform to reality. They mean that some awkward clue, some nubbly piece of evidence, has been twisted or ignored in order to fit in with some readymade theory. "The corpse was found in this man's bath, *ergo* he is the murderer." But that is not a true syllogism. No, the truth lies far behind the appearances, in the daring, cunning and cruelty of a brilliant but perverted mind, which is rankling with the sexual jealousy provoked many years past. Her Magnanimous Man, her aristocrat, her crystal of the truth, has to be many-faceted or he would be unable to be sensitive to sufficient indications of reality, to the subtleties of an actual human situation. Slightly unreal therefore as Peter Wimsey is, he has to be as many-sided as is conceivable, for he is a sort of concretization of the full human definition of man in the abstract. He has to be the rational animal, the political animal, whose specific characteristic, his intelligence, must be orientated towards the truth.

"Truth, truth, truth," then, is the dominating motive behind these detective investigations. Truth as the great human achievement, the harmonization of the mind with reality. Hence Miss Sayers' devotion to Oxford, of which she is a graduate, on one of whose governing bodies she sits, and about which she has written perhaps the best of all Oxford novels, *Gaudy Night*. This, formally a detective story, is in substance an appreciation of the intellectual integrity of the University. From the Radcliffe Camera, "Harriet Vane was left to survey the kingdom of the mind, glittering from Merton to Bodley, from Carfax to Magdalen Tower . . . Spire and tower and quadrangle, all Oxford springing underfoot in living leaf and enduring stone, ringed far off by her bulwarks of blue hills. "Towery City and branchy

between towers." Harriet is the main character in the novel; formerly a student, now a graduate of Shrewsbury College, hauled in to investigate a college scandal. Peter Wimsey flashes into the pages towards the end, to solve a mystery which involves the whole question of the proper place of women in the world, a point we shall consider later. Subordinate in the book to that, is Harriet's own personal feminine problem (shall she marry Peter Wimsey?) a psychological development ironically and admirably written in. But what Harriet discovers primarily is the intellectual integrity of the academic world, and the supreme satisfaction derived from the pursuit of truth in scholarship. Here some interesting figures come in, Miss de Vine, Miss Lydgate,<sup>5</sup> Miss Hillyard, all exhibiting that one strand of scholastic veracity under widely differing temperaments. This is exemplified when Harriet forces herself to understand why she cannot easily write to Peter Wimsey explaining the mess his undergraduate nephew, Lord St. George, has got himself into, and again when she returns from the Oxford atmosphere to London and goes to a cocktail party where the literary and publishing world is strongly represented. "The room in which it was held was exceedingly hot and crowded, and all the assembled authors were discussing (a) publishers, (b) agents, (c) their own sales, (d) other people's sales, and (e) the extraordinary behaviour of the book-of-the-moment selectors in awarding their ephemeral crown to Tasker Hepplewater's *Mock Turtle*. 'But what's *Mock Turtle* about?' inquired Harriet. On this point the authors were for the most part vague." Perhaps it is most forcibly brought out when at the end the agonized criminal breaks out, "You'd destroy your own husbands, if you had any, for an old book or bit of writing. . . . He didn't mean to steal that bit of paper—he only put it away . . . but you killed him for it."

Yes, but the concealment of the "bit of paper" falsified the book, and the author knew it; and he had been hounded out of academic life for that reason. "Take the Book . . . truth." Books should be the vehicles of truth, intercourse between human beings made widely available and permanent in form. Books are a great preoccupation with Miss Sayers, and she has a mind stored with quotations from them. So, naturally, have her characters, and she is happy to introduce into *Busman's Honeymoon* a Superintendent of Police who can play the quotation game with

Harriet and Peter Wimsey. When Wimsey is desperate for a solution of the crime which threatens the woman he loves with the gallows, he gazes for inspiration at his bookshelves. "The stately volumes on his shelves, rank after rank of saint, historian, poet, philosopher, mocked his impotence." Miss Sayers is too consciously literary, too maddeningly well-read; but her erudition serves the purpose of underlining the great part books play in extending the common territory of the human race, its knowledge of reality.

The study of the rational animal, of man as man, cannot however be complete without a study of man's Creator. The quality of man, as of anything else, is inadequately stated without reference to the purpose of his making, and therefore of his Maker. And so it was perhaps inevitable that this luminously humane writer should be deeply preoccupied with religion and morality, the relationship between man, his acts, and his last end, God. Inevitable or not, Miss Sayers is a deeply religious woman. Already in the detective stories she has shown strong moral preoccupations apart from the primary one of elucidating the truth. *The Documents in the Case* is a terrible exposure of sexual selfishness; *Unnatural Death* of ruthless self-will; *Clouds of Witness* of the results of blind passion; *Murder Must Advertise* of the drug traffic; *Busman's Honeymoon* of avarice. In *Whose Body?* she makes a remarkable attack on the brilliant scientific intellect that makes a god of itself, believes itself to be absolved from all norms of morality, and teaches with bland blasphemy the doctrine that God is "a secretion of the liver." Above all, there is (and it is remarkable how strong a moral force this is in most detective writings) the demand that murder, that first grand sin after the Fall, that destruction of the ultimate thing in man's power, life itself, the demand that *murder will out*. The blood of Abel cries from the ground. Murder, from whatever motive, that usurpation of the Almighty's privilege, in whose hands our lives lie, must be uncovered and justice take its course. Thus, in that magnificent novel *The Nine Tailors*, where a vile criminal dies from the sound-impact of a great peal of bells in the tower where he is tied up, the instrument of murder has been unwittingly the bell-ringers of whom Wimsey by chance is one; Will Thoday, who tied him up there for the best of reasons, little guessing what was to happen, is not held guilty of murder by the police; but he

dies at the end of the book all the same. And in *Busman's Honeymoon* Wimsey declares that, hideous though it is that he, rich, aristocratic, untempted by avarice, should bring to the scaffold a poor man robbed of his savings, yet *murder will out*; for him it is a kind of categorical imperative that he should detect the murderer, come of it what may.

The detective novels of Miss Sayers are, then, if you like, tracts in disguise, vehicles for her strong feeling of the intellectual truth-co-ordinating nature of man, and of his moral purpose and God-given destiny. But, since the publication of *Busman's Honeymoon*, Miss Sayers has produced no more detective novels. Struck no doubt by the crisis of the times and the ever-growing threat of Nazism and kindred perversions to the reasonable nature of man and the survival of the Christian Church, she has turned to the explicit defence and promulgation of these things. This she has done by a series of tracts of varying length and a number of religious plays. One may, of course, question whether the inculcation of morality by the indirect method of the detective novel, the powder in the jam method, is not more effective in the long run than this direct teaching; but it would be ungenerous to criticise Miss Sayers for feeling that the urgency of the task demanded a more immediate approach. After all, she threw up what must have been an exceedingly lucrative line of publication for one which could hardly hope to be as generally attractive and devoted her literary felicity, her powers of cogent reasoning, and her ingenuity, to the explicit service of Christian faith and morals. Of the tracts, two are full-sized books: *Begin Here* and *The Mind of the Maker*. The first is a swift philosophical survey of the history of the modern centuries, detecting the causes of the menace of a subhuman civilization with which Christianity is now confronted; the second a persuasive *exposé* of her contention that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not an obscure, recondite one, but a teaching that informs and specifies all human creative activity, inspiring the finest performances of the human personality. Of her shorter tracts, *The Other Six Deadly Sins*, is an admirable reminder, very much needed to-day, that sins against continency do not exhaust the list of vices, but that pride, avarice, gluttony, for example, are equally a danger to the salvation of the soul. *Strong Meat* is a brief but magnificent vindication of the maturity of the Christian doctrine, showing it to be a creed

which fulfills the widest aspirations of humanity, a strong and virile faith which is appropriately called by St. Augustine "the food of the full-grown." The plays (Miss Sayers is a staunch Anglican churchwoman) *The Zeal of Thy House* and *The Devil to Pay* (on the Faust theme) were designed to be acted, like mediaeval mysteries and moralities, in the precincts of churches and cathedrals. Of the two *The Zeal of Thy House* is perhaps the finer, in which the mediaeval architect of Canterbury Cathedral is the central figure, a brilliant and arrogant artist who claims that God requires him for the completion of a great work of art, his cathedral, that God cannot do without him. His punishment comes when he is shattered in body by a fall from the roof of the cathedral, and he is brought ultimately to that proper state of humility where he consents to hand over the completion of his work to another, to the recognition that he, the divinely-inspired architect, is not indispensable to his Maker. Incidentally, both in the course of the accident and in the reduction of William of Sens to true penitence, Miss Sayers strikes out a proper appreciation of the nature of sin. The rope that let him fall had a flaw in it, which the two testers of the rope failed to see: the one, a workman, because he was too busy looking at a beautiful woman, the other, a monk, because he had tightly shut his eyes in order not to see her. And the Prior, hearing William of Sens' confession, absolves him from his sins of the flesh but is urgent to turn his thoughts to the sins of the mind, so deeply embedded in the artist's arrogant soul that he is with difficulty made to realise them. "*Ab oculis meis munda me.*"

Another play, on the Incarnation, *He That Should Come*, adumbrates Miss Sayers' greatest dramatic work *The Man Born to be King*, that series of plays in which her detective faculties are also exercised, the sequence of plays on the life of our Lord, commissioned by the B.B.C. for broadcasting. Here all her qualities find their scope. "Take the Book." The documents in the case are the Gospels; the central figure is the great Man, Man in his perfection, who is also the supreme expression of the moral law, for He is God as well. Transferring her great gifts to a higher plane, Miss Sayers has depicted on the human side of our Lord's nature, a sensitive, brilliant, exceedingly intelligent, generous leader of men, moving inexorably through great agonies of soul to the accomplishment of his divine purpose. Round him

circulate the Harriet Vanes, Miss Climpsons, Bunters and Charles Parkers in Mary Magdalen, Martha, the Apostles. The supreme Man is spit upon, the perverted intellects try to bend the deity to their will in Judas and Caiaphas and Herod, as Julian Freke tries to make all subserve his scientific absolutism. Behind the often puzzling Gospel narrative, Miss Sayers suggests an extraordinarily convincing politico-religious plot, which would, if true, elucidate much of that puzzle. But above all she is orientated towards the root of the matter : that here at a certain moment of historic time one Person, with both divine and human nature, did certain things, spoke certain words, and showed that the solution of all human problems lies beyond the scaffold and the grave and that He, the Victim, was also to be the Saviour, the Advocate, the Judge and the Avenger. In an extraordinary consummation of all her main lines of thought Miss Sayers has, in this series of twelve dramas with their attendant commentary on the characters, shown the full solution of those lines of thought in the Word made Flesh.

One last consideration remains. Miss Sayers is a woman with a strong masculine intelligence, as Peter Wimsey is a man with a feminine intuitive perceptiveness. In *Gaudy Night* she has brought out explicitly the problem of woman's place in the world, contrasting the irrational devotion to one's man with the highest intellectual womanhood. At the end of that book the writer and scholar, Harriet Vane, accepts Peter Wimsey and marries him ; and in *Busman's Honeymoon* the process of assimilation of the two sensitive intelligent natures is described involving the inevitable clash of intellectual independence with the personal dependence of the woman on the man ; and in those two novels she has indicated how the natures of man and woman are best harmonized by a common devotion to the truth.

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<sup>1</sup> I deliberately omit consideration of most of her short stories, in which the traveller in wine, Montague Egg, is the central figure. Peter Wimsey plays him off the boards.

<sup>2</sup> *cf. Clouds of Witness, Murder Must Advertise.*

<sup>3</sup> *cf. Five Red Herrings.*

<sup>4</sup> Except when Emily destroys the possible finger-prints in *The Nine Tailors*, and Mrs. Ruddle disturbs the port in *Busman's Honeymoon*

<sup>5</sup> "Since Miss Lydgate had perfected . . . an entirely new prosodic theory, demanding a novel and complicated system of notation which involved the use of twelve different varieties of type; and since Miss Lydgate's handwriting was difficult to read, and her experience in dealing with printers limited, there existed at that moment five successive revises in galley form at different stages of completion, together with two sheets in page proof and an appendix in type-script, while the important introduction still remained to be written."

# John Steinbeck



BERNARD RAYMUND

IN the work of John Steinbeck two influences, absorption in the class struggle and an ardent love for all that is small, inarticulate and irresponsible, converge to make *The Grapes of Wrath* a masterpiece, probable the chief American masterpiece. I do not pretend that these are the only tendencies visible in the work of this very complex and mature artist. There is for example a strain of mysticism, deriving illegitimately from D. H. Lawrence perhaps, and given its final form in that curious early work *To a God Unknown* (1932). There is contrariwise an interest in scientific research that displays itself in the frequent technical terms that slip into his writing, and that has found its outlet recently in his book on the marine life of the Gulf of California. And there is in Steinbeck too a gusty sympathy with the hard riding, hard hitting life of the Old West that comes to the surface of most of the stories in *The Long Valley* (1937), and naturally with the gaudy toughness of the Spanish pioneers, which made the stuff of his only outright unsuccessful novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929). But these, as will be readily apparent, are minor threads in his design, clues to the manner in which his art grew to its full stature, and need only be stated to be understood.

The first of Steinbeck's major preoccupations, that with class struggle, or as he might prefer to say, with the social revolution, does not need much discussion: not because it is unimportant, for it is an impulse that lifts his work above that of Thomas Wolfe who knew nothing about it or assimilated nothing, but because so much has been written on the subject that more is superfluous. When Steinbeck left Leland Stanford University to work his way to New York on a cargo boat the doctrinaires of the Social Revolution knew all the answers. Soviet Russia had just completed the first Five Year Plan. Léon Blum appeared to promise

France the first taste of prosperity-for-all since 1918. Republican Spain had thrown off the last of the Bourbons. Even Germany listened to Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht and wavered on the verge of revolution. It would have been surprising had a young hod-carrier helping build Madison Square Garden not imbibed a certain amount of this optimism. Why not? Why shouldn't it happen, even in America? For that matter, even in California, American reaction's last stronghold?

Accordingly, when in *An American Testament* Joseph Freeman challenged his fellow-writers to create for the American proletariat, Steinbeck responded with his novel *In Dubious Battle*: a first-hand account of the lives of the fruit-tramps of the Golden State and what they suffer when they dare strike against the organized interests of the growers, the banks that control them, and those behemoths of agriculture: the land-companies. Of the hopeful company of proletarian novels born in the same year few have survived, for the simple reason that the American proletariat prefers Micky Mouse or Superman. *In Dubious Battle* has been saved from oblivion only because re-issued in *The Modern Library*. Though unsuccessful technically, *In Dubious Battle* displays some of Steinbeck's very special powers: that of moving bodies of men, not in the stagey fashion of a Dumas or Dickens, but as a congeries of individuals startlingly distinct from one another. The power of building toward a catastrophe, or creating the "sense of doom." The power of using the elements to his purpose: such floods, such dust storms, such killing heat, have never been created by any prose writer before. Conrad's sixty-four-dollar words pale before this architect of naked violence. Here, as in *To a God Unknown* are powerfully evocative passages, now muted and possibly apologetic, of that primitive natural mysticism I have mentioned before. Says the doctor who has given his services to the strikers, to fall in the end a victim to the vigilantes: "I only hear heartbeats through a stethoscope. You *hear them in the air*." And though rigidly subordinated to the theme of revolution, there appears here Steinbeck's astonishing sense of the relation between man and woman:

"A dark-haired woman stood in front of a tent, her head thrown back; and her throat was white. She combed her hair with long, beautiful sweeps of her arm. When Jim walked by

she smiled wisely and said, 'Good morning,' and the combing didn't pause. Jim stopped. 'No,' she said. 'Only good morning.'

" 'You make me feel good,' he said. For a moment he looked at the long white throat and the sharply defined jaws. 'Good morning again,' he said, and he saw her lips form to a line of deep and delicious understanding . . . "

At first I had hesitated to speak of Steinbeck as the poet of the irresponsible. The qualities most of us look for in fiction are not primarily poetic. The converse has been frequently stated but it is a delusion of the aesthetic spawned in the lush days of James Bianch Cabell and lingering into our own. Would it not suffice, I asked myself, if I title this paper Prophet of the Irresponsible, for even Steinbeck's weakest works ring with prophetic passages? But when I consider the tenderness, the humour, the pathos (implied, never explicit) of the stories in that wonderful collection, *The Pastures of Heaven* (republished 1945 or 1944) of the tales in *The Long Valley*, so pointed, so racy, so indigenous, not to mention *Tortilla Flat* and *Of Mice and Men*, it seems to me that *poet* is too weak a term for this writer. One can pick up almost any volume of Steinbeck and find passages that for cadence, evocation of emotion, and descriptive power are scarcely to be surpassed in our language. You may look in vain for such tumultuous prose poems as star the novels of Thomas Wolfe: Steinbeck works with restraint and an economy of means perfectly keyed to the work as a whole:

"He walked down the line of tents, and each tent was a little cave of darkness. SnORES came from some, and in the entrances of others men lay on their stomachs and looked out at the morning; and their eyes were full of the inwardness of sleep. As he walked along some men came into the air and hunched their shoulders and drew down their necks against the cold. . . . " (*In Dubious Battle*, p. 297).

"The sycamores were yellowing and already the ground was thick with the first fallen leaves. The team entered the long road that hid the river, and the sun was low over the seaward mountains. . . . With evening the air grew clear with moisture, so that the mountains were as hard and sharp as crystal. After the sun was gone there was a hypnotic time when Joseph and Elizabeth stared ahead at the clear hills and could not take their eyes away.

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The pounding hoofs and the muttering of water deepened the trance. Joseph looked unblinkingly at the string of light along the western mountain rim. His thoughts grew sluggish, but with their slowness they became pictures, and the figures arranged themselves on the mountain tops. A black cloud sailed in from the ocean and rested on the ridge, and Joseph's thought made it a black goat's head. He could see the yellow, slanting eyes, wise and ironic, and the curved horns. ". . . A flight of birds rolled and twisted high overhead, and they caught the last light on their flickering wings, and twinkled like little stars. A hunting owl drifted over and shrieked his cry, designed to make small groundling creatures start uneasily and betray themselves against the grass. The valley filled quickly with dark, and the black cloud, as though it had seen enough, withdrew to the sea again." (*To a God Unknown*, p. 77.)

And it is of "small groundling creatures": ranch dogs, calves, chickens, cow ponies, small boys with calloused feet, half-wits, bindle-stiffs, the inarticulate, the frightened and homeless, that Steinbeck is the poet. It may be said that Steinbeck was slow to find himself. But the writer who was able in *The Pastures of Heaven* to create such perfect gems of irresponsibility as the father and son of *Nothing so Monstrous*, or the Indian schoolboy with a passion for drawing (*Origin of Tolarecito*) was ready, we can now see, to crown his work with *The Grapes of Wrath* when given the necessary impetus. This paper deals primarily with Steinbeck's novels and not with his shorter narratives; but in parenthesis it may be remarked that the only collections of American short stories in our day worth owning were written by Californians: John Steinbeck and William Saroyan, both notable for their sympathy with the small and submerged. There the connection between the two ceases, Saroyan having stopped at precisely that point while Steinbeck, as we shall see, went on to glory.

*Tortilla Flat* (1935) was Steinbeck's first popular book, so instantaneously and completely popular that in his preface to the 1937 edition he felt compelled to write: "When this book was written it did not occur to me that paisanos were curious or quaint, dispossessed or underdogish. They are people whom I know and like, people who merge successfully with their habitat. In men this is called philosophy, and it is a fine thing. Had I

known that these stories and these people would be considered quaint, I think I never should have written them . . . But literary slummers have taken these people up with the vulgarity of duchesses who are amused and sorry for a peasantry. If I have done them harm by telling a few of their stories, I am sorry. It will not happen again."

Perhaps the fate of popularity always awaits the picaresque, especially if the picaresque is done by the hand of the poet. Danny and his friends, Pilon, Pablo, Jesus Maria Corcoran, the Pirate, and Big Joe Portagee, are a company that only awaited their Cervantes to make their adventures, however wildly improbable some of them may be, a perpetual delight. Steinbeck demonstrates his poetic faculty by nothing so much as the care he has bestowed on their language. The paisano, he tells us, "speaks English with a paisano accent and Spanish with a paisano accent," and by some magic Steinbeck has preserved for us the flavour of this speech, which reads like nothing so much as a very free and very simple translation. I think the affection we so quickly acquire for them, the laughter they inspire in us, so close to tears, spring largely from this fact, one of the most notable artistic achievements of our day.

The world that the paisano inhabits is not, happily, the world we know, nor are its standards those he lives by. They have only the most distant acquaintance with manual labour; theft unless they are the victims, they know by games less onerous; which may be said equally of the perils of alcohol and sex.

"Clocks and watches were not used by the paisanos of Tortilla Flat. Now and then one of the friends acquired a watch in some extraordinary manner, but he kept it only long enough to trade it for something he really wanted. Watches were in good repute at Danny's house, but only as media of exchange. For practical purposes, there was the great golden watch of the sun. It was better than a watch, and safer, for there was no way of diverting it to Torelli.

"In the summer, when the hands of a clock point to seven, it is a nice time to get up, but in the winter the same time is no value whatever. How much better is the sun! When he clears the pine tops and clings to the front porch, be it summer or winter, that is the sensible time to get up. That is the time when one's hands do not quiver nor one's belly quake with emptiness." (*Tortilla Flat*, p. 237-8.)

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The "friends" achieve their principal, almost their only contact with "Society" through what they are prone to term the "poison of possessions." Their story, in fact, begins with Danny's inheritance of two small houses from the *viejo*, his grandfather, one of which, after the consumption of a gallon of wine, the first of many throughout the book, he rents to his friend Pilon for fifteen dollars a month.

"Pilon," says Steinbeck, "except for his year in the army, had never possessed fifteen dollars in his life. . . . It is impossible to say whether Danny expected any rent, or whether Pilon expected to pay any. If they did, both were disappointed. Danny never asked for it, and Pilon never offered it."

Fortunately Pilon is saved from the necessity of paying by renting a part of the house, at the same price per month, to his friend Pablo, recently out of jail.

"Look, you will pay only fifteen dollars a month! And you may use all the house except my bed, and all the garden. Think of it, Pablo! And if someone should write you a letter, he will have some place to send it to.' . . . If Danny should ever ask for money, Pilon could say, 'I will pay when Pablo pays.'"

It is only a logical step for the two to rent part of the house to Jesus Maria Corcoran at the identical figure in order to save him from the night air. But before the plan can be consummated, a matter involving a quantity of wine, the house catches fire, and Danny is no longer a landlord. Such screwball economics, it may be averred, contribute more to entertainment than to the elucidation of social ethics. But taken in reverse . . .

For even in this joyful book there hover those shadows that Steinbeck never quite loses sight of. For the friends the Law is a force prone to introduce disorder into their quiet days. And while gaol is no disgrace, of course, and provides a certainty of three meals a day and plenty of sleep, the Law has other arms not so complaisant. There is that statute by means of which Mr. Torelli, the bootlegger, almost acquires Danny's property in payment of a debt of twenty-five dollars. There is the Army, to all of them, but more especially to Big Joe Portagee, a bewildering interruption of their placid lives. But they are shadows dissipated in the end. For these, in spite of the worry they cause their parish priest, are, to quote Henry James, "pure because they were innocent, innocent because they were strong."

Much the same might be said of the bindle-stiff in *Of Mice and Men*, who watches over his half-wit friend so compassionately, and in the end, so ineffectually. Lacking the simplicity of the paisano, the two are both completely devoid of a sense of status, both are victims of status as it exists in the Golden State. Criticism of California *mores*, either in the person of the young rancher and his friends, or of the lovely small-town tart, his wife, is never more than implicit. They move with an implacable doom upon the half-wit, whose fate we foresee from the moment he helplessly crushes his pet mouse to death. The march of the inevitable is terrific and gives the novel in retrospect much greater stature than its actual 50,000 words. It is a commentary upon the blindness of contemporary criticism that this tragedy should have been literally lapped up by an American public supposedly allergic to tragedy. I commend for all readers Steinbeck's opening idyll: the stream, the yellowing willow trees, the breath of autumnal quiet: an exquisite scene upon which suddenly emerge the two scarecrow figures of his opus with a touch I am tempted to call Shakespearean. And yet I question that tragedy finds its proper scope in the fate of the mentally defective. Steinbeck's interest in half-wits dates from far back. He evidently received early and profound impressions of their undeserved treatment by their more fortunate fellows. But if his reputation depended on this aspect of his artistic sensitivity it would be built upon a slender and insecure basis. Something more needed to be added.

It could be argued that two happenings alone made *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) possible: the dust storms of the American Southwest that blotted out the sun over half the continent, and the depression. I think, however, that I have shown that such a potential had by this time been built up in the person of John Steinbeck that the lightning would have struck irrespective of historical movement. Only the story would have been different.

It is interesting at this point to trace the growth of Steinbeck's powers in the interim between *The Long Valley* stories and his great novel. In the first place he is not so much occupied with the intrinsically irresponsible, as with forces that turn the self-respecting and in their native environment, quite competent loads into hungry, homeless, irresponsible outcasts, who with thousands like themselves scavenge upon the richest agrarian



civilization the world has ever seen. The manner in which corporate greed, individual cupidity, narrow suspicion, and their prostitution of the Law hound the Joad family to pieces, is one of the most vivid indictments ever brought against the Commonwealth. It is still unsafe to mention the book in most parts of California.

Secondly, Steinbeck like many of the rest of us displays a progressive disillusion with the gospel according to St. Marx. This was to be expected of course: times have a way of moving, catchwords of becoming less catchy. But it is of the essence of Steinbeck's greatness that he can discern *no* answer. He falls back upon no easy remedy, no favourite lib-lab nostrum. And precisely to the extent that this is so *The Grapes of Wrath* is the greater novel. Having grown up among what Steinbeck calls "the paradoxes of industry" he could have found facile expedients among the properties of the New Deal, then still new: Public Works, Reclamation, Farm Security Administration, to lead the Joads to the Promised Land. To do so would have been to fly in the face of history, but when have novelists not violated the laws of historical necessity? That Steinbeck did not earns our profound thanks.

But I anticipate. Steinbeck had first to create the Joad family before he could permit social chaos to destroy it. Oklahomans, as indigenous as the red, soil they farm and from which they are on the point of being driven by the implacable tractors of the great land companies, the Joads are at once simple yet gifted in all a farmer needs to know, poor, yet unaware of poverty, mild mannered yet full of unexpected violences. Ma is the rock about which this entity clings, and the unfolding of this beautiful character is, parenthetically, the supreme artistic achievement of our times. Pa is the fountain of agrarian wisdom; but as their troubles multiply on the long journey to the West, Pa's position in the family grows more and more nebulous until at the end he complains (though it is hardly a complaint) "Funny! Woman takin' over the fambly. Woman sayin' we'll do this here, an' we'll go there. An' I don' even care." Titular head of the family is Grampa, so rooted in the land that to leave it proves fatal. Gramma "had survived only because she was as mean as her husband. She had held her own with a shrill ferocious religiosity that was as lecherous and as savage as

anything Grampa could offer. . . .” Tom, to whom the book is dedicated, is fresh out of State Prison on parole, his crime having been a casual murder in a brawl at a country dance. Noah, lonely and solitary is understood perhaps only by his father, who cherishes a feeling of guilt that his second boy is not “right.” Al, dashing in high-heeled boots, red arm bands and a ten-gallon Stetson aspires to be an automobile mechanic and needless to say idolizes his convict brother. And there are Ruthie and Winfield, the youngest, Rosasharn and her young husband Connie, Uncle John, in whose tiny house they are all temporarily housed, in Tom’s words, “Lonest goddamn man in the world” since his young wife died “Crazy kind of son-of-a-bitch too . . . A lone man like that don’t live long. But Uncle John’s older’n Pa. . . . Meaner’n Grampa.” And to this aggregation is added by request, the one-time preacher Casy, who, when Granma insists he say grace replies humbly: “I got to tell you I ain’t a preacher no more. If me jus’ bein’ glad to be here and bein’ thankful for people that’s kind and generous, if that’s enough—why, I’ll say that kinda grace. . . .” Casy’s death at the hands of the California vigilantes stands in curious comparison with similar episodes in *In Dubious Battle*, so much fuller is he of life and, though he would disavow it, of grace, than even the noblest character in the earlier book. We have to take Steinbeck’s word for it that there is room for all these in one 1925 Hudson truck. That he persuades us is one more item to his credit as a craftsman.

These are substantially the same people as the Georgia crackers of *Tobacco Road* and Erskine Caldwell’s novels and short stories. They trace the same descent from America’s earliest settlers, have the same rock-ribbed virtues and astonishing vices of which snuff is the least. But whereas Caldwell exhibits his characters as if to say, “Would you believe it? They are really *human*,” Steinbeck allows his to make their own way into our esteem and affection. We are told right at the start how “mean” Grampa is. We end, when he is taken dying from the truck, wondering just what “meanness” that remarkable old pioneer was guilty of. Similarly with Tom, whose story is brought out piecemeal, unwillingly, and who rises in our regard from page to page, just as pretty Rosasharn falls (though not too far). And when at Sallisaw they come out finally on the highway that will take them straight through to California (U.S. 66) we (and they) meet many

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more families, whom now we have been taught to see through the Joads' eyes :

" . . . Because they were lonely and perplexed, because they had all come from a place of sadness and worry and defeat, and because they were all going to a new mysterious place, they huddled together ; they talked together ; they shared their lives, their food, the things they hoped for in the new country. Thus it might be that one family camped near a spring and another camped for the spring and for company, and a third because two families had pioneered the place and found it good. And when the sun went down, perhaps twenty families and twenty cars were there . . . Every night a world created, complete with furniture—friends made and enemies established ; and every morning the world torn down like a circus. . . . "

Among them are Mr. Wilson and his wife Sairy, whose car Al and Tom repair, and who travel with them until Sairy can go no farther and must beg comfort for her ordeal from Casy, than whom no preacher could be more different from those that lie, cheat, shout, and fornicate through the pages of Erskine Caldwell.

And the language these people speak is all the same tongue. In his faithful following of this speech-pattern Steinbeck, as I have pointed out, took his first, or almost his first lesson, in the writing of *Tortilla Flat*. But just as the canvas is larger, so here, is his execution bolder, his attention to detail more rigorous. The talk reveals as nothing else could, and it is endless but never monotonous. Some day some professor will catalogue how many characters are brought to life in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Most of us are content to know that it is a multitude of infinite variety : the dust rises from the steps of living men and women and the hum of talk about the evening fires is in our ears. And it is a real world of variety and the unexpected, of labour, and sweat and anxiety and of simple fare and the sleep of exhaustion.

Binding together the odyssey of these people, practically as they tell it themselves, shorn of abstractions they distrust, are chapters of commentary, at first somewhat marred by that slick photographic " realism," almost *de rigueur* in 1939 (professional reviewers in America still tumble for this sort of stuff), but later building into a powerful frame of reference for the folk-tale of the Great Migration :

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"The houses were left vacant on the land, and the land was vacant because of this. Only the tractor sheds of corrugated iron, silver and gleaming, were alive; and they were alive with metal and gasoline and oil, the discs of the plows shining. The tractors had lights shining, for there is no day and night for a tractor and the discs turn the earth in the darkness and they glitter in the daylight. And when a horse stops work and goes into the barn there is a life and a vitality left, there is a breathing and a warmth, and the feet shift on the straw, and the jaws champ on the hay, and the ears and the eyes are alive. There is a warmth of life in the barn, and the heat and smell of life. But when the motor of a tractor stops, it is as dead as the ore it came from. The heat goes out of it like the living heat that leaves a corpse. Then the corrugated iron doors are closed and the tractor man drives home to town, perhaps twenty miles away, and he need not come back for weeks or months, for the tractor is dead. And this is easy and efficient. So easy that the wonder goes out of work, so efficient that the wonder goes out of land and the working of it, and with the wonder the deep understanding and the relation." (Chapter Eleven.)

"Now farming became an industry, and the owners followed Rome, although they did not know it. They imported slaves, although they did not call them slaves: Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos. They live on rice and beans, the business men said. They don't need much. They wouldn't know what to do with good wages. Why, look how they live. Why, look what they eat. And if they get funny—deport them.

"And all the time the farms grew larger and the owners fewer. And there were pitifully few farmers on the land any more. And the imported serfs were beaten and frightened and starved until some went home again, and some grew fierce and were killed or driven from the country. And the farms grew larger and the owners fewer. . . . And the dispossessed, the migrants, flowed into California, two hundred and fifty thousand, and three hundred thousand. Behind them new tractors were going on the land and the tenants were being forced off. . . . And a homeless hungry man driving the roads with his wife beside him and his thin children in the back seat, could look at the fallow fields which might produce food but not profit, and that man could know how a fallow field is a sin and the unused land a crime

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against the thin children. . . . He drove his old car into a town. He scoured the farms for work. Where can we sleep the night ?

" Well, there's Hooverville on the edge of the river. There's a whole raft of Okies there.

" He drove his old car to Hooverville. He never asked again for there was a Hooverville on the edge of every town." (Chapter Nineteen.)

" And now the great owners and the companies invented a new method. A great owner bought a cannery. And when the peaches and pears were ripe he cut the price of fruit below the cost of raising it. And as cannery owner he paid himself a low price for the fruit and kept the price of canned goods up and took his profit. And the little farmers who owned no canneries lost their farms, and they were taken by the great owners, the banks and the companies who also owned the canneries. . . . The little farmers moved into town for a while and exhausted their credit, exhausted their friends, their relatives. And then they too went on the highways. And the roads were crowded with men ravenous for work, murderous for work.

" And the companies, the banks worked at their own doom and they did not know it. The fields were fruitful, and starving men moved on the roads. The granaries were full and the children of the poor grew up rachitic, and pustules of pellagra swelled on their sides. The great companies did not know that the line between hunger and anger is a thin line. And money that might have gone to wages went for gas, for guns, for agents and spies, for blacklists, for dulling. On the highways the people moved like ants and searched for work, for food. And the anger began to ferment." (Chapter Twenty-One.)

Of what faces the loads and the thousands of their fellow-Okies they learn even before they cross the Rocky Mountains. It is their tragedy that they are driven forward to a certain and terrible doom. Let some of them comment in their own tongue :

" ' But it don't make no sense ! ' Pa cried.

' Not till you see the fella that put out this here bill. You'll see him, or somebody that's workin' for him. You'll be a-campin' by a ditch, you an' fifty other famblies. An' he'll look in your tent an' see if you got anything lef' to eat. An' if you got nothin,' he says, Wanna job ? An' you'll say, I sure do, mister. I'll sure thank you for a chance to do some work. An' he'll say, I can use

you. An' you'll say, When do I start? An' he'll tell you where to go, an' what time, an' then he'll go on. Maybe he needs two hundred men, so he talks to five hundred, and they tell other folks, an' when you get to the place, they's a thousan' men. . . . Well, this here fella's got a contract to pick them peaches, or—chop that cotton. You see now? The more fellas he can get, an' the hungrier, less he's gonna pay . . . ” The circle of faces looked coldly at him. The eyes tested his words. The ragged man grew self-conscious. ‘I says I wasn't gonna fret ya, an' here I'm a-doin' it. You gonna go on. You ain't goin' back.’ ” (Chapter Sixteen.)

At the Colorado River they meet other defeated travellers on their way home. And the story they tell grows more ominous :

“ ‘ Good lan', you say? An' they ain't workin' her? ’

‘ Yes, sir. Good lan' an' they ain't! Well, sir, that'll get you a little mad, but you ain't seen nothin'. People gonna have a look in their eye. They gonna look at you an' their face says, I don't like you, you son-of-a-bitch. Gonna be deputy sheriffs, an' they'll push you aroun'. You camp on the roadside an' they'll move you on. You gonna see in people's faces how they hate you. An'—I'll tell you somepin. They hate you 'cause they're scairt. They know a hungry fella gonna get food even if he got to take it. They know that fallow lan's a sin an' somebody gonna take it. What the hell! You never been called ‘ Okie ’ yet. . . . Purtiest goddamn country you ever seen but they ain't nice to you, them folks. They're so scairt an' worried they ain't even nice to each other.’ ” (Chapter Eighteen.)

It is here that Noah drifts away from the family, and Connie, his dreams of self-improvement blasted, deserts Rosasharn and her unborn child. Granma dies as they cross the desert, and Ma, that they may not be delayed, does not tell the family, and even at the quarantine station, with her amazing fortitude, keeps the inspectors from examining the load. Beyond, in their first “ Hooverville ” :

“ ‘ Know what they was payin', las' job I had? Fifteen cents an hour. Ten hours for a dollar an' a half, an' ya can't stay on the place. . . . That's why them han' bills was out. You can print a hell of a lot of han' bills with what ya save payin' fifteen cents an hour for fiel' work.’ . . .

‘ But they is work,’ Tom insisted. ‘ Christ Almighty, with all

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this stuff a-growin': orchards, grapes, vegetables—I seen it. They got to have men. I seen all that stuff.' . . . The young man squatted on his heels. 'I'll tell ya,' he said quietly. 'They's a big son-of-a-bitch of a peach-orchard I worked in. Takes nine men all the year roun'. . . Takes three thousan' men for two weeks when them peaches is ripe. Got to have 'em or them peaches'll rot. So what do they do? They send out han' bills all over hell. They need three thousan' an' they get six thousan'. They get them men for what they wanta pay. If ya don' wanta take what they pay, goddamn it, they's a thousan' men waitin' for your job. So ya pick, an' ya pick, an' then she's done. Whole part a the country's peaches. All ripe together. When ya get 'em picked, ever' goddamn one is picked. There ain't another damn thing in that part a the country to do. An' then them owners don' want you there no more. Three thousan' of you. . . An' besides, you don' look nice, livin' in ol' tents; an' it's a pretty country, but you stunk it up. They don't want you aroun'. So they kick you out. . . .' (Chapter Twenty.)

And "kicked out" the Joads are, not for the first time, leaving Casy behind to go to jail in place of the young man, whose fault, if it is a fault, he has taken on himself to spare the other's wife and children. For a time they sojourn in the government camp at Weedpatch, experience the unthought-of luxury of hot showers and water-closets, and as a part of that fine experiment in self-government, help nullify an attempt of deputy sheriffs to break up THE COMMUNITY. But self-government, weekly dances, nursing care, all the amenities of communal life, do not avail in the face of dwindling resources and lack of work, for the camp does not have even a garden patch for its members to tend. The Joads must turn their backs on the only decencies they have found in California, and as unconscious strike-breakers take work heavily escorted by armed guards, in a peach orchard. And here in a squalid camp, robbed by the extortions of the company store, the family loses its chief prop when Tom, enraged at the murder of Casy, now leader of the strikers, clubs a vigilante to death and becomes a fugitive from "justice."

Even the comparative decencies of the cotton patch at Tulare and a comfortable home in a box-car cannot long forestall the doom that is impending. The rains come, those terrible California rains that none can foresee, the workers are miserably

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flooded out, Rosasharn's baby is born dead, and as the final touch of pathos she gives her milk to a fellow-worker who has starved himself to feed his small son.

"The rain stopped. On the fields the water stood, reflecting the grey sky, and the land whispered with moving water. And the men came out of the barns, out of the sheds. They squatted on their hams and looked over the flooded land. And they were silent. And sometimes they talked very quietly.

"No work till spring. No work.

"And if no work—no money, no food.

"Fella had a team of horses, had to use 'em to plow an' cultivate an' mow, wouldn' think a turnin' 'em out to starve when they wasn't workin'.

"Them's horses—we're men." (Chapter Twenty-Nine.)

It is Steinbeck's great gift that he never lets us forget that these are men. Not the raw material of revolutionary dogma, not "folksy" characters to delight New York readers and theatre-goers, but a people that has lost its birth-right, and some day in its anger may find it again. How, he does not tell us, nor do they know. But their scripture, the testament of the irresponsible who in their day will inherit responsibility, they will find already written for them in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

During the early part of the war Steinbeck produced *The Moon is Down*, a short propaganda novel which was adequate for its purpose but not to be regarded by the same standards as *Grapes of Wrath* or some of the earlier books. More recent (1945), and more worthy of Steinbeck is *Cannery Row*. This volume is not as we might imagine, another *Tortilla Flat*. Which is not to say that it is either better or worse; simply, it is John Steinbeck. Dedicated to Doctor Ricketts with whom he explored *The Sea of Cortez*, the stories revolve about the Western Biological Supply, the doctor's creation, his obsession, his source of livelihood, and the squalid waterfront it adorns. Though in their way the principal characters are as irresponsible as the paisanos of *Tortilla Flat*, they are troubled by wrongs they cannot right, ethics they cannot understand. Unlike the paisanos they realise that such things as standards exist, however they may depart from them. Mack and his friends, those consummate individualists that inhabit the "Palace Flop-House and Grill" are cluttered up with inhibitions: they have a yen for furniture whether acquired



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honestly or not ; they mope when the waterfront ostracizes them for an " unsuccessful " party they throw for Doc at the Western Biological during his absence ; one of them, Gay, is even married; and Mack confesses to have enjoyed that state. Worst of all, when they consent to work they can hold down steady jobs for as long as three months at a stretch : a feat beyond the endurance of Danny and his friends. Anyhow, as I have indicated, they are not central to the book, though they contribute to 90 per cent. of its hilarity.

Some will hold that Doc, whom all the Row revere and sponges upon, is essentially irresponsible. But his irresponsibility is intellectual and not innate. Fond of classical music, beer, and the invertebrates that are his business, he is what we should all like to be if we dared. But to change places with Pilon, or Pablo, or Jesus Maria Corcoran would be as inconceivable to us as it would be to them. Doc provides much the same commentary on the Row that Steinbeck supplies in *The Grapes of Wrath*, though with a perfect informality that represents a forward step in technique. Of Mack and the boys (note they are always spoken of as " boys ") he says to Richard Frost, the local frustrate, that they " know everything that has happened in the world and possibly everything that will happen. I think they survive in this particular world better than other people. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed . . . Mack has qualities of genius. They're all very clever if they want something. They just know the nature of things too well to be caught in that wanting." Says Hazel : " I bet Mack could of been president of the U.S. if he wanted . . . "

" What could he do with it if he had it ? " Jones asked. " There wouldn't be no fun in that."

It is easy to ask too much of a writer, to ask too much of a good thing. We miss the uncalculated, the innocent bawdry of *Fortilla Flat*, distinctly not supplied by Dora and her girls of the Bear Flag. We miss the flow of racy conversation that carries *The Grapes of Wrath* across a burning continent to unforgettable conclusions. Of criticism of the acquisitive society in which we live, or try to live, the book affords the author little scope. There are Doc's infrequent gnomic utterances. There is the little story of what happens to the half-wit Frankie when he tries to achieve

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a present for Doc's birthday : a theme recurring as we have seen in almost all of Steinbeck's books. There are strictures on the nature of the local sardine canneries : "that industry . . . which complains bitterly when it does not make back its total investment every year in profits." But the theme that bulks so large, so ominous, and so successfully in *The Grapes of Wrath* here undergoes an understandable temporary eclipse. Like ourselves, Steinbeck is waiting for what will happen next.

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# T. S. Eliot



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"MAN," says Reinhold Niebuhr in *The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, Human Destiny*, "is, and yet is not, involved in the flux of nature and time. He is a creature, subject to nature's necessities and limitations ; but he is also a free spirit who knows of the brevity of his years and by this knowledge transcends the temporal by some capacity within himself. There is no point in human history in which the human spirit is freed of natural necessity. But there is also no point at which the mind cannot transcend the given circumstances to imagine a more ultimate possibility."

Man's ability to transcend to some extent the situation in which he is involved gives rise to two problems. On the one hand, within the limits of his circumstances, he has the power of choice in his actions ; on the other, while he shares the finiteness of the plants and animals, he is (unlike them) aware of it. The first is the problem of Sin ; the second, the problem of Death ; and both are, at the bottom, the same problem. (To deny that the problems exist, is, of course, merely one way of answering them.) The second problem seems to be the particular concern of many younger writers to-day. That they should be increasingly aware of death is not surprising in the present state of world affairs. The problem of Death is that it may seem to make life meaningless. If it is an end in both senses—a goal as well as a finish—then all human endeavour is pathetically futile. Against this there are three main reactions :

- (1) A belief in the immortality of the individual.
- (2) Some sort of mysticism, in which the transient life of the individual is given significance by being merged in or brought into relationship with the eternal life of something greater than itself.

- (3) Despair, which may take many forms, including that of those who courageously recognize it for what it is and set about to make for themselves a framework of meaning out of myth.

It is one of the major aspects of the work of T. S. Eliot, particularly his later work, that it provides the Christian answers to these problems. Eliot himself is a Christian and I think it is useful to examine his work in the light of Christian doctrine. Moreover, this doctrine gives us the advantage of providing terms that are definite and definable in meaning. Poetry, it is true, is often concerned with meaning which is not definable, though not necessarily less definite. And theology, as Mr. C. S. Lewis has pointed out, is a map, while Eliot's poetry is the memoirs of an explorer. Yet Eliot himself has not disdained to use the map, and it may help us to follow him if we do the same. It must be admitted, however, that such criticism as this is not concerned primarily with the poetry, and it is in the end the poetry which has claim on our concern. But it presumes the poetry—for without the poetry I should never have troubled to undertake the job of examination.

Eliot holds the Christian conception of Man as a being who has fallen from the state of joy and goodness which God intended for him, but who nevertheless can be redeemed by grace. In *The Waste Land* we are presented with a picture of human society rotten at heart and stumbling, where pleasure is corrupt and the spirit is dead. *The Hollow Men* shows men hopeless and lifeless, like stuffed guys on bonfire night, ready for the burning. All this is in revolt against the nineteenth century liberal conception of the inevitable perfectibility of Man and against the optimism which accompanied it. And because Eliot grew up among such optimism his rejection of it may have rather too disillusioned a tone, but it is certainly not like the gloom of other modern writers who see little hope for Man. For Eliot does not forget the other side of the question. Man can be redeemed by grace, indeed his redemption has been accomplished already if only he has the sense and the humility to take advantage of it.

The obstacle to the operancy of grace is the self-centred will, for it is in a defect of the will that the human weakness lies—a defect which, it should be noticed, cannot be overcome merely by an effort of the will. Eliot, therefore, is greatly concerned

with the subjugation of the human will to the divine will. This is the theme of *Murder in the Cathedral* :

"A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. It is never the design of man ; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr."

In order to prepare the soul for this submission, it should learn "to divest itself of the love of created beings," to live a life of discipline and penitence. And finally, it must be ready to give up self altogether, to go and seek God by the Negative Way, to

"Descend lower, descend only  
Into the world of perpetual solitude."

In *East Coker* the symbol for this annihilation of the self is found in darkness :

"I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon  
you  
Which shall be the darkness of God."

The darkness obliterates the vanities and distractions of the self and the world in which the self exists, until at last there is not oblivion but a greater understanding :

"So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness  
the dancing."

The last words glance at an image which has been cropping up over and over again in Eliot's later poetry "the still point of the turning world." It is, in its essentials, the same figure as that of light at the heart of darkness, the withdrawal from the distraction of the world into the stillness which is itself the source of all movement. It occurs in *Murder in the Cathedral* :

"that the wheel may turn and still  
Be forever still" ;

in *Ash Wednesday* :

"Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled  
About the centre of the silent Word,"

and, associated with the medieval conceit of the cosmic dance, in *Burnt Norton* :

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" At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh  
not fleshless ;  
Neither from nor towards ; at the still point, there  
the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement . . .  
Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the  
dance."

In *East Coker* the Negative Way is summarized in a list of guide-book maxim for tourists, derived from St. John of the Cross :

" In order to arrive at what you do not know  
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.  
In order to possess what you do not possess  
You must go by the way of dispossession.  
In order to arrive at what you are not  
You must go through the way in which you are not.  
And what you do not know is the only thing you know  
And what you own is what you do not own  
And where you are is where you are not."

I have dwelt upon Eliot's treatment of the Negative Way because it can be interpreted not only as a search to obliterate the will of self in the will of God, but as a search to experience the timeless in time. It is therefore an attempt to solve both the problem of Sin and the problem of Death, which, as I have said, are ultimately one and the same and are always understood as such in Eliot's poetry. The Negative Way is the ascetic's way to overcome the problem of Death :

" . . . to apprehend  
The point of intersection of the timeless  
With time, is an occupation for the saint."

There is also another way, which might be called the poet's way—the unexpected experience of the eternal in a sudden flash of insight :

" . . . the unattended  
Moment, the moment in and out of time,  
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,  
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning  
On the waterfall, or music heard so deeply  
That is it not heard at all."

Agatha in *The Family Reunion*, puts the two ways side by side :

"There are hours where there seems to be no past or future,  
Only a present moment of pointed light  
When you want to burn. When you stretch out your hand  
To the flames. They only come once,  
Thank God, that kind. Perhaps there is another kind,  
I believe, across a whole Thibet of broken stones  
That lie, fang up, a lifetime's march."

Yet the two ways are not self-subsistent. Each leans towards the other. The poet must be a saint and the saint must be a poet. In Agatha's speech, just quoted, the moment of illumination is linked with the purgatorial fire, and after "the wild thyme unseen," the rest :

"Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action."

Parallel to this attempt to experience the timeless in time (and perhaps, really, the same as it) is the attempt to conceive all time as contained in the present.

In the earlier poems, the pressure of the past on the present is felt most keenly in *The Waste Land*. The structure of the poem is, very roughly, the presentation of the ritual of the old fertility cults in scenes of modern life ; and conversely, the interpretation of modern life in terms of the fertility cults. By this means Eliot is able to make his incidents have reference to at least two points of time at once—beside all the other symbolic significances. Thus Ferdinand and Miranda are also the hopeless frustrated lovers of today, and Lil and Albert, denying their natural instincts by abortion and contraception, are also people of a primitive age failing to fulfil the prescribed rites of fertility.

*Gerontion* was an experiment in the same sort of technique, but in the Sweeney poems we have the past and the present brought together in a simpler, more obvious way. Sweeney in his bath is prefaced by an Homeric landscape :

"... the bold anfractuons rocks

Faced by the snarled and yelping seas."

a church congregation is contrasted by means of the stained-glass windows with the prophets and John the Baptist. And perhaps most effective and moving of all, a drab little conspiracy in a cafe or brothel, at which there may or may not be a plot to murder Sweeney, is seen in relation to the death of Agamemnon :

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"The host with someone indistinct  
Converses at the door apart,  
The nightingales are singing near  
The Convent of the Sacred Heart,  
And sang within the bloody wood  
When Agamemnon cried aloud,  
And let their liquid siftings fall  
To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud."

In these poems, no doubt, the main aim is dramatic and satirical, but there is also a feeling of the interdependence of past and present and even the existence of each within each.

With this in mind it may be useful to take a glance at *Prufrock* and one or two of the earliest of Eliot's published poems, in particular *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*. These poems are no doubt greatly influenced by the French Symbolists, and the technique used in them is that of free (or moderately-free) association of ideas. But the form in which they are presented to the reader is that of a dramatic monologue, and the general effect is of memories of different times and occasions of the past gathered together in the present of the poem. These poems, therefore, like *The Waste Land*, are to some extent a picture of the short-circuiting of time. Indeed this may perhaps be regarded as a characteristic of most "symbolist" poetry, though not, admittedly, a very important one.

✓ This attempt to see all time as contained within the present is expressed much more fully in the later poems and especially in the *Four Quartets*.

At the beginning of *Burnt Norton* we read :

"Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past."

At the beginning of *East Coker* :

"In my beginning is my end,"

and at the end of the same poem :

"In my end is my beginning,"

we find the idea broadened out so that the ends of events are seen latent in their causes and vice versa.

To attempt to make use of this interdependence of time, to foretell the future for the purpose of personal gain seems always to have appeared peculiarly perverted to Eliot. The fortune-teller is a recurrent figure in his poetry, and usually rather an



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unpleasant one. There is the well-known Madame Sosostris in *The Waste Land* who :

“ Had a bad cold, nevertheless  
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,  
With a wicked pack of cards.”

“ Wicked ” suggests the fashionable slang of the 1920's, but I feel that the word was chosen for more reason than this.

In *Sweeney Agonistes* we meet Dusty and Doris, two rather bewildered and pathetic people, trying to discover from the cards what will happen to them in the immediate future, worried about the visitors whom they may receive that night :

“ Dusty : There's an awful lot in the way you feel  
Doris : Sometimes they'll tell you nothing at all  
Dusty : You've got to know what you want to ask them  
Doris : You've got to know what you want to know  
Dusty : It's no use asking them too much  
Doris : It's no use asking more than once  
Dusty : Sometimes they're no use at all.”

Then, in *The Dry Salvages* there are the :

“ anxious worried women  
Lying awake, calculating the future.”

And in the same poem popular and more sophisticated forms of fortune-telling are brought together in a long, intricate passage, deliberately dry :

“ To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,  
To report the behaviour of the sea monster,  
Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,  
Observe disease in signatures, evoke  
Biography from the wrinkles of the palm  
And tragedy from fingers ; release omens  
By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable  
With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams  
Or barbituric acids, or dissect  
The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors—  
To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams ; all these are  
usual  
Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press :  
And always will be, some of them especially  
When there is distress of nations and perplexity  
Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road.”

This theme of the short-circuiting of time, whether with or without attempts at divination, echoes constantly throughout the *Quartets*, but perhaps the most remarkable example is in the middle section of *Little Gidding*. We have already entered a small country church in midwinter spring, and been aware of the nearness of the past and especially of the seventeenth century, and felt Nicholas Ferrar and King Charles I hovering around like ghosts. And now we meet another figure who may be identified with Brunetto Latini of Canto XV of the *Inferno*, though he reminds me still more of Virgil as he appears in the first Canto, There, Virgil, who is dead, meets Dante, who is alive, on the shore which is beyond time, neither heaven, nor purgatory nor hell, nor even earth, and helps him to evade the three beasts, Luxury, Ambition and Avarice. And in Eliot's poem the counsel which is given from this being who is beyond time is again the counsel of penitence together with a promise of terrible self-knowledge :

"And last, the rending pain of re-enactment  
Of all that you have done, and been ; the shame  
Of motives late revealed, and the awareness  
Of things ill-done and done to other's harm  
Which once you took for exercise of virtue.  
Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains.  
From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit  
Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire  
Where you must move in measure, like a dancer."

The refining fire is presumably a reference to a passage in the *Purgatorio* (Canto 26) from which Eliot had already quoted in *Ash Wednesday* and *The Waste Land* :

"Ara vos prec, per aquella valor  
que vos guida al som de l'escalina,  
sovegna vos a temps de ma dolor."

Poi s'ascese nel foco che gli affina."

('Now I pray you, by that Goodness which guideth you to the summit of the stairway, be mindful in due time of my pain.' Then he hid him in the fire which refines them.)

The point particularly to be noticed is that the souls in purgatory voluntarily submit to their suffering, and even seek it out with eagerness, because they know that by this they shall eventually be among the blessed.

The figure of the ghost, reminds us that the main answer of Christianity to the problem of Death is not to be found in mysticism but in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Not to many is given the saint's or even the poet's experience of the timeless in time, but to all is promised eternal life by the Christian faith. But because the belief in eternal life is one about which people have thought little during the last few decades, it may be as well to consider it. Eternity, then, does not consist of time going on and on and on. This is merely to conceive of eternity in terms of time. Even if we try to think of it as present all within itself at one moment we still do not escape from the imagery of time. Eternity is something beyond and above time, not of the nature of time at all. The difficulty about the doctrine of eternal life is not that of the conception of life as going on and on and on, endlessly, in terms of time, but the difficulty of understanding how a human personality, which expresses itself and is recognized in temporal terms and media, can be translated into timelessness. How, in other words, can the timeless express itself in time. It seems unreasonable. And, so far as human reason goes, it *is* unreasonable, and we would say it was impossible too, were it not (from the Christian point of view) that it has already happened. For the Incarnation is just this—the expression of the timeless in time. The Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul centred round the Incarnation, for the Resurrection is a corollary of the Incarnation. And the Incarnation is the intellectual focal point of Eliot's musing on time and eternity :

“ The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

Here the impossible union  
Of spheres of existence is actual,  
Here the past and future  
Are conquered, and reconciled.”

Eliot is not referring exclusively to the Incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is saying rather that all human apprehension of the timeless has in it something of the quality of the Incarnation. Whether the apprehension is gained as the result of “ a lifetime's death in love,” or whether it is given in a moment of illumination

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    (" After the kingfisher's wing  
    Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still  
    At the still point of the turning world."),  
it is yet an example of the timeless expressing itself or revealing itself in time, and therefore it is an incarnation of that which is beyond time and space into terms that can be understood or appreciated within the limitations of time and space and of the visible and material world. In *The Rock* much the same imagery is applied specifically to the Incarnation in the Christian sense :

    "Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in time and of time,

    A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history ; transecting, bisecting the world of time, a moment in time but not like a moment of time,

    A moment in time but time was made through that moment : for without the meaning there is no time, and that moment of time gave the meaning."

The Incarnation lies often behind the thought of the *Four-Quartets* and especially of *The Dry Salvages*, where the fourth section is a prayer to the Blessed Virgin, who was, as it were, the instrument of incarnation. Throughout the poem rings the sound of the Angelus, which reminds the faithful of the angel's annunciation to the virgin and of the Nativity which was to follow. The Annunciation itself was a message from the timeless to time, and so in this poem, where the Angelus becomes linked with the sound of a warning-bell on a buoy, we are reminded continually of :

    " . . . the unprayerable

    Prayer at the calamitous annunciation,"

of :

    " . . . the undeniable

    Clamour of the bell of the last annunciation,"

and of :

    " . . . the sound of the sea bell's

    Perpetual angelus."

The sea represents the wastes of time (Marvell's " Deserts of vast eternity " transposed to salt water), mere flux without shape or purpose, beyond the limits of the imagination, and without the rhythm of the seasons and of birth and growth and death, the recognizable and measureable rhythm of man's life which in the

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poem is symbolized by the river. The seabell-angelus strikes across this as a message from beyond time—or not so much a message as a warning :

“ And the ground swell, that is and was from the beginning,  
Clangs  
The bell.”

And the warning-bell is also reminiscent of the clock and the knell, the bells which indicate the passing of time and the passing of life :

“ The tolling bell  
Measures time not our time, rung by the unhurried  
Ground swell, a time  
Older than the time of chronometers.”

The passing of time is of a new and tremendous importance because it is seen in relation to that which is not time, in fact it might not be too much to say that only by transcending time can we be aware of time. Hence the cry which went up in *Ash Wednesday* :

“ Redeem the time,”

And now, looking back, we can see a new significance in the awareness of the passing of time which was present in all Eliot's earlier work. The barmaid's cry in *The Waste Land* :

“ Hurry up please it's time  
I hurry up please it's time,”

and the distorted reference to Marvel's “time's winged chariot” :

“ But at my back from time to time I hear  
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring  
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring,”

take on a tragic as well as a satirical tone, for they speak of creatures who have lost the knowledge that time is redeemable, who, indeed, are unaware that time needs to be redeemed.

In *Little Gidding*, the last of the *Quartets*, the symbol for the expression of the timeless in time (the Incarnation) is found in Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost became, as it were, incarnate in the bodies of the apostles. The lovely opening of the poem describes a moment within the rhythm of the seasons which

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somehow seems to exist independent of that rhythm, seems indeed to have the quality of eternity ("sempiternal"). This is the moment of the poet's illumination, but it is also the moment when the Holy Spirit descends :

"Midwinter spring is its own season  
Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,  
Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.  
When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,  
The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,  
In windless cold that is the heart's heat,  
Reflecting in a watery murmur  
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.  
And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,  
Stirs the dumb spirit : no wind, but pentecostal fire  
In the dark time of the year."

And later :

" . . . the communication  
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of  
the living."

And again :

"After the dark dove with the flickering tongue  
Had passed beyond the horizon of his homing."

And finally, as we have found so often in this study, the message of the timeless to time is a message of penitence, and the two themes of Death and Sin are made one :

"The dove descending breaks the air  
With flame of incandescent terror  
Of which the tongues declare  
The one discharge from sin and error.  
The only hope, or else despair  
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—  
To be redeemed from fire by fire."

I take it that the two fires are the fires of purgatory and of hell, and that the lines mean that only by penitence and the voluntary acceptance of suffering can we escape the despair and consequences of sin.\* But they mean also that only by heeding the message from the timeless, the pentecostal fire, can we escape from the pain and burning of time.

I have said that all expressions of the timeless in time have something of the general quality of the Incarnation. Yet the one Incarnation, while beyond time and belonging to all time, was revealed at one particular time and in one particular place. The Church, however, has in the Mass a means whereby the Incarnation and the Atonement are perpetually remembered or re-enacted.\* In this way the Mass shows not only the general quality of incarnation, but also something of the particular quality of the one Incarnation. It is fitting therefore that in *East Coker* the penitential suffering of humanity is linked with the Mass in a section which treats the world as a hospital :

“ The chill ascends from feet to knees,  
The fever sings in mental wires.  
If to be warmed, then I must freeze  
And quake in frigid purgatorial fires  
Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars.”

In this predicament there is no choice for us but to submit in humility and patience, and to seek grace through the means that are offered to us .

“ The dripping blood our only drink,  
The bloody flesh our only food.”

It is significant to read of

“ . . . the absolute paternal care

That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere,”  
for the Cranmerian diction, which is not out of place in these metaphysical stanzas, reminds us by its Latinism (prevents—goes before) of that topsiturvidom of time which is recurrent theme in these poems.

I have dealt in greater detail with the problem of Man and Death as it shows itself in Eliot, but I want to emphasize that this can never really be separated from the problem of Man and Sin because both are the result of Man's peculiar situation, in that he is both involved in the flux of nature and time and yet is able to transcend it.† It is one of the signs of the depth of Eliot's understanding of Man that he never attempts to separate these two aspects of the problem. I have tried to show how often in his

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\*I am not now concerned with the different interpretations of this which exist among different sections of Christians.

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work the transcendence of time can be sought only by the subduing of the self ; and, also, how when the timeless reveals itself in time, its message is always that of the necessity for penitence and the overcoming of sin ; and how, conversely, sin can be overcome only by the timeless. It is, not a vicious, but a virtuous circle. I will give one more illustration, because I think that its full implications (not necessarily conscious in the poet at the time of composition), may have been overlooked. It is from *Asb Wednesday* :

“ Lord, I am not worthy  
Lord, I am not worthy  
but speak the word only.”

The most obvious reference is to the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt. viii). The passage is worth quoting :

“ And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered, and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof : but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me : and I say to this man, Go and he goeth ; and to another, Come, and he cometh ; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it he marvelled, and said unto them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”

The connection of this with the purgatorial and penitential theme of *Asb Wednesday* is clear. Here there is the need for faith, the need for humility, and the acknowledgement of complete helplessness of Man. But there is also another reference. A variation of these words (“ Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof but speak the word only and my soul shall be healed”) are repeated silently by some Christians immediately before and at the time of communion. They are also used sometimes in mental communion, as practised by those who are unable to be present at church.

And so, once again, we are reminded of the Mass, the Incarnation, the point of intersection of the timeless with time, and the two-fold problem of Man is seen truly as one.



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# E. M. Forster

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D. S. SAVAGE

IN view of the present popular eminence of E. M. Forster, it is a striking reflection that the five novels upon which his public reputation is based were, with one exception, composed within a period of six years during the first decade of the present century. And even the exception, *A Passage to India*, although not published until 1924, was drafted some twelve years before that date.\* E. M. Forster, it appears, is an Edwardian novelist, surviving into the contemporary world as a public personality on the basis of a past creativity which has been outlasted by its early products.

Forster is a significant writer. But significant writers are of two kinds. There are those, and they are the greater ones, whose creative work proceeds from an achieved centre of being, and whose continual creativeness is the expression of the constant extension of their grasp upon and penetration into reality. And there are those others, necessarily more numerous, whose work takes its shape from the exteriorization of an inner conflict—which derives, that is to say, from a condition which is antecedent to an achieved inner integration. These latter writers work out, in the course of their art, a more or less significant personal logic, and with its conclusion, if they have not succeeded in achieving a valid inner integration which will remove them to the plane of the creators, they relapse into non-significance. Forster is a writer of the latter type, and it will be my purpose to reveal in this essay the significant pattern which underlies his work and his silence.

## I

E. M. Forster's first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, was published in 1905. In 1907 there appeared *The Longest Journey*, and this was followed in 1908, by *A Room With a View*. Each of these novels is concerned with the dual theme of personal salvation and the conflict of good and evil. Of the three it is *The*

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\* *vide*, *The Writings of E. M. Forster*, by Rose Macaulay.

*Longest Journey* which is the most emotionally intense and personal, the others being more objectively conceived novels of social comedy. It may be convenient here to consider the first and the third novel together.

In each of these novels we have two opposed worlds or ways of life, and characters who oscillate between the two worlds. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread* the contrast and the conflict are between the world of "Sawston"—that is, of smug, respectable conventionality, and that of "Italy," representing the free play of genuine natural feeling. Sawston is personified in Mrs. Herriton, insincere, calculating, cold, and moved by snobbery and her fear of public opinion, Italy by Gino, affectionate, impulsive and natural, a primitive whose very vulgarity has charm and warmth. In *A Room With a View*, the antithesis is similar, but this time, although the first part of the book is set against the Italian background, it is the radical Emersons, father and son, who represent life, truth, sincerity. The heroine, Lucy Honeychurch, is torn between the values which they represent and those of the pretentious, bookish Cecil Vyse and the insincere and intriguing Charlotte Bartlett.

In each of these novels there is a spiritual conflict. In Forster's words, describing Lucy's inner struggle :

"The contest lay not between love and duty. Perhaps there never is such a contest. It lay between the real and the pretended . . ."

The "real," however, seems to be associated with the natural ; the "pretended," with the falsities of convention which deny and frustrate the natural impulses and passions.

In many respects the theme of *The Longest Journey* recapitulates that of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room With a View* ; but its development is more complex, and the spiritual drama more intense. It is, no doubt, this intensity which gives the book its overcharged emotional atmosphere and its consequent queer iridescence as of something faintly morbid or perverse. For the intensity does not seem justified by the terms of the drama. Which means that the drama itself is emotionally worked up to a point at which it becomes false to the terms of reference within which the mind of the novelist is operating.

Throughout all of Forster's writings there is to be seen an unfortunate tendency to lapse, at moments when the author feels

the necessity to indicate something beyond the level of human relationships in their social setting (a level upon which alone he is perfectly at ease), into "poetical" vagueness of the most embarrassing kind. An example of this is to be found early in *The Longest Journey*, when Rickie glimpses Agnes and her lover Gerald Dawes, at a moment of erotic passion.

"Rickie limped away without the sandwiches, crimson and afraid. He thought, 'Do such things actually happen?' and he seemed to be looking down coloured valleys. Brighter they glowed, till gods of pure flame were born in them, and then he was looking at pinnacles of virgin snow. While Mr. Pembroke talked, the riot of fair images increased. They invaded his being and lit lamps at unsuspected shrines. Their orchestra commenced in that suburban house, where he had to stand aside for a maid to carry in the luncheon. Music flowed past him like a river. He stood at the springs of creation and heard the primeval monotony. Then an obscure instrument gave out a little phrase. The river continued unheeding. The phrase was repeated, and a listener might know it was a fragment of the Tune of tunes. Nobler instruments accepted it, the clarionet protected, the brass encouraged, and it rose to the surface to the whisper of violins. In full unison was Love born, flame of the flame, flushing the dark river beneath him and the virgin snows above. His wings were infinite, his youth eternal; the sun was a jewel on his finger as he passed it in benediction over the world. Creation, no longer monotonous, acclaimed him, in widening melody, in brighter radiances. Was Love a column of fire? Was he a torrent of song? Was he greater than either—the touch of a man on a woman?"

Forster's books abound in passages of this sort, which, however, represent merely an intensification of his normal "sensitive" and "charming" style.\* The prevalence of this sort of false, over-ripe writing indicates some basic uncertainty in

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\* On the question of Forster's famous charm, I find myself endorsing Laura Riding's remarks concerning *A Room with a View*. "Before reading this book I had met Mr. Forster and found him charming; the book was recommended to me by my friends as a charming book. I read it. I could not deny that it was charming. Yet it was to me unpleasantly painful to read. It was too charming. . . . But the truth is that it affected me in the same way as would the sight of a tenderly and exquisitely ripe pimple. I longed to squeeze it and have done with it."—*Anarchism is not Enough*, p. 50.

Forster's grasp of life, and to apprehend the roots of that uncertainty it is necessary to investigate the disparity between the religious drama which he unfolds and the ultimate principles to which it is referred.

What are the characteristics of this religious drama? First of all, it proffers the possibilities of salvation or of damnation, as we may see in the cases of Philip Herriton and Lucy Honeychurch in the other novels. Philip, granted a vision of "infinite pity and . . . majesty" (which, incidentally, had an erotic source), "underwent conversion. He was saved." Lucy, consequent upon a denial and a lie, joins "the vast armies of the benighted" and "the night received her." In *The Longest Journey* there are indications that the issue of salvation depends upon the acceptance or rejection of a "symbolic moment," the symbol for Rickie being his illegitimate half-brother, Stephen Wonham. When his kinship with Stephen is revealed to him (although he is then under the mistaken impression that Stephen was the child of his father, whom he hated) he is inexpressibly shocked and disgusted, but his better impulse is to acknowledge him honestly and to inform him of the relationship. The impulse is quashed by Agnes, and Rickie succumbs inwardly to the false life represented by Sawston and the Pembrokes. When a later opportunity presents itself of acknowledging Stephen, and he again fails at the crisis, we are told that "he remained conscientious and decent, but the spiritual part of him proceeded towards ruin." His inner ruination continues, but is interrupted by Stephen's appearance at Sawston, coincident with that of Stewart Ansell; who—when Stephen is callously turned away, by Agnes—publicly denounces the inhumanity and hypocrisy of Rickie, and there follows Rickie's abandonment of the Sawston life and his reconciliation with Stephen, in which we must presumably see his movement towards salvation.

Stephen, then, in this novel, is the touchstone of reality. He is the "elemental character" who "sees straight through perplexities and complications, who is utterly percipient of the reality behind appearances, both in matters of general truth and of incidents in the story," to quote from an essay by Peter Burra which Forster has had printed as an introduction to the Everyman edition of *A Passage to India*. And this is how Ansell, "the articulate philosopher," sums him up :

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"A silence, akin to poetry, invaded Ansell. Was it only a pose to like this man, or was he really wonderful? He was not romantic, for Romance is a figure with outstretched hands, yearning for the unattainable. Certain figures of the Greeks, to whom we continually return, suggested him a little. One expected nothing of him—no purity of phrase nor swift-edged thought. Yet the conviction grew that he had been back somewhere—back to some table of the gods, spread in a field where there is no noise, and that he belonged for ever to the guests with whom he had eaten."

This, then, is the touchstone of reality and of salvation which Forster proposes; and it is not difficult to see that it is inadequate. It does not justify the emotional intensity of the drama which is indicated as taking place in Rickie's soul. Between the poles of conventionality and naturalness there is room for drama of a sort, but not a drama impregnated with the highly-pitched emotional excitement of *The Longest Journey*. A spiritual conflict is imported into a naturalistic framework, and the effect cannot but be one of sentimentality and falsification.

This confusion of the spiritual and the naturalistic runs throughout the earlier novels. As in D. H. Lawrence (although Lawrence, with finer sensitiveness, steered clear of Forster's irrelevant sweetness and charm), spiritual attributes are conferred upon biological phenomena. Thus, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Philip's "conversion" follows upon the erotic emotions stirred in Caroline Abbott by the frankly sensual Gino. In the same way, in *The Longest Journey*, not only is Rickie's personal drama initiated by his witnessing of the erotic passage between Agnes and Gerald Dawes, but the "acceptance" upon which his salvation depends centres upon the result of his dead mother's illicit intercourse with her farmer lover—a Lady Chatterley situation. The importance which Forster confers upon sexual passion is shown both by the excessive excitement with which he approaches it, and the way in which he connects it with violent death, the finality of death being utilized to confer something of its own ultimate or absolute character upon the emotion stirred by sex.

To endow conventionality with all the attributes of the powers of darkness is, of course, grossly to overstate the matter. The world represented by the word "Sawston" has genuine

undercurrents of evil which we are made to feel, but which are simply not explicable in the terms of Nature versus Convention which are proposed. When we encounter such a sentence as this :

"Then he (*i.e.*, Rickie) . . . prayed passionately for he knew that the conventions would claim him soon . . ."

we at once feel the somewhat ridiculous inadequacy of the antithesis which provides the frame of reference for the novel.

Not only in *The Longest Journey* is the question of salvation (raised in the action of the narrative and brought to an arbitrary conclusion there) left with a good many loose ends flying: the same is true of the other novels. What is to happen to Philip Herriton, now that his eyes have been opened to the wonder and beauty of life? What will happen to Lucy and George Emerson now that their difficulties are over and they are happily married? It is hard to see any more finality in their "saved" state than that implied in the surely insufficient and question-begging symbol, towards the end of *The Longest Journey*, of "Wiltshire"—the life of pastoral satisfactions.

The incompleteness and indeed the reversibility of Forster's moral symbolism is shown in his "realistic" confusion of the attributes of the "good" and "bad" types. Having said, as Burra says, that Forster introduces an "elemental" character into each of his books, whose wisdom "puts into ironic contrast the errors and illusions of the rest," and having pointed out that "In the case of the men the stress is laid on the athletic, of the women on the intuitive," one can point to characters who possess the external evidence of these qualities, and who yet turn out to be on the wrong side of the moral fence. George Emerson, Gino and Stephen may be said to be "athletic," and therefore on the side of the "real." But equally athletic, though by no means on the same side, are Gerald Dawes and Agnes, while Stewart Ansell, undoubtedly a touchstone of spiritual truth, is not athletic at all. Similarly, in the case of the "intuitive" women. Of them, Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Wilcox and perhaps Mrs. Honeychurch are recognizably "good" characters, while Mrs. Failing, a woman of the same basic type, and who possesses the additional symbolic advantage of living in Wiltshire, is as recognizably "bad." One might compare also Cecil Vyse with Philip Herriton and Stewart Ansell. This confusion is true to

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life, no doubt, but it is not true to the symbolical pattern of the novels, and it is necessary to ask what are the reasons for this confusion.

The most plausible explanation lies in the very plain fact that the middle-class existence which Forster portrays, the life of the irresponsible, moneyed, parasitical bourgeoisie, is false, because it is based upon social falsehood, and nothing can ever be made really right within it. Consequently, no stable system of moral symbolism can be erected upon it.

This is not to say that his characters are by that fact deprived of the possibility of spiritual struggle; only that such a struggle which takes place within a spiritual arena circumscribed by its reference to the framework of their false social order, and whose outcome does not result in an overthrowing or a repudiation of the limits set around their lives by their privileged social position, is thereby rendered devoid of real and radical significance. Unlike the rich of other times, their privileges carry with them no burden of responsibility, and thus possess no concrete social sanction. The penalty they pay for their social advantages is a heavy one—a fundamental unreality which vitiates the personal dramas which take place in the closed social circuit to which they are condemned. For it is obvious that an inner spiritual change which affects one's attitude to one or two other selected persons only, and does not extend itself to include literally every other human being irrespective of artificial social distinction (and this has obvious political implications) is invalidated from the start. But at the point at which some attempts to deal with this question would seem necessary, Forster brings his stories to a close.

It is not difficult to perceive the connection existing between the false social circumstances which set limits to reality for the sake of their own perpetuation, and the inhibiting factors which prevent Forster from reaching out to ultimates for the validation of his religious drama. The novelist, despite his perception of the reality of personal struggle towards salvation, is himself unable to transcend the pattern imposed on reality by the self-interest of the class to which he belongs, and instead, therefore, of permitting the drama with which he is concerned to break through the pattern and centre itself within the perspectives of reality, which are absolute perspectives, and which alone will justify a *spiritual* drama, he curtails the perspectives themselves



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and attempts to persuade himself and his readers that the drama takes place between the poles of Nature and Convention, with Nature filling the place of God or the Absolute.\* The novelist's own awareness that this will not justify a real spiritual dynamism in his characters must eventually follow.

### II

It is possibly the realization of something of this which led Forster, broadly speaking, to abandon the personal drama and to embrace the social issues which are clearly displayed in his next novel, *Howards End* (1910). From the point reached in *The Longest Journey* there were two possible paths for one in Forster's situation: either to affirm the reality of the spiritual, and thus to justify the drama of personal salvation, by placing the individual (and thus by inference his social circumstances) in the ultimate perspectives of existence; or to affirm the primary reality of the social and to reduce the spiritual to an epiphenomenon dependent upon the social pattern. The first alternative would have made possible a continuation and development of the personal drama; the second could only have necessitated a transition from the personal to the social level, a movement from the centre to the periphery; which was, in fact, the result.

*Howards End* must be interpreted from this point of view. Here is an evidently allegorical contrast between the inner world of personal existence, represented by the cultured sisters Helen and Margaret Schlegel, and the outer world of the practical organization of living represented by the business-like, British-to-the-backbone, empire-building Wilcoxes. But before we move on to a consideration of the relationship between the two families, the focal point of the novel must be considered.

That focal point is money. Hardly are the Schlegels introduced before the subject of their investments is touched upon.

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\* Of all the characters in the early novels who represent "the real" as against "the pretended," not one derives his sanction from any other than a natural principle. Stephen and Gino are a direct appeal to biological, not to say physiological, values. In the case of Stephen it is made clear that he is a crude atheist, while Ansell is evidently an ethical materialist. Old Mr. Emerson, a religious figure, is an old-fashioned agnostic radical. The clearest insight, however, into Forster's religiosity is to be derived from a study of his early short stories where nature is deified as Pan and conventionalism is contrasted with the a-moral universe of dryads, mermaids and satyrs.

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Money, indeed, is the *leit-motif* which accompanies the Schlegels throughout the book. And it is poverty, in the character of Leonard Bast, which underscores their wealth and culture. The significance of this bringing to the surface of what had hitherto been kept in concealment (in order to permit the strictly personal drama) hardly needs to be emphasized. *Howards End* is in one of its aspects a justification of economic privilege, but the recognition of the individual's dependence upon social circumstances destroys the possibility of the drama of personal salvation, and substitutes the drama of social relationships.

The argument of *Howards End*, at all times implicit and at times declared, is that culture and the good life depend upon economic security, which in the capitalistic world of the time means privilege. "To trust people is a luxury in which only the wealthy can indulge; the poor cannot afford it"—such statements as this are intermittent in the early parts of the book. Because he does not enjoy the financial advantages of the Schlegels, Leonard Bast's aspirations towards culture are made to appear pathetic in their hopelessness. But the character of Leonard Bast is not the result of authentic observation of life: he is unconsciously falsified, in a manner which will be considered below, to fit within the preconceived interpretation of reality which underpins the structure of the novel.

The respective positions in this novel of Leonard Bast and Henry Wilcox have an obvious symbolic importance, in that the leanings of the Schlegel sisters are divided between the two. The impulsive and idealistic Helen reacts vehemently against Mr. Wilcox, and her reaction drives her towards Leonard Bast, who has suffered as a result of the business man's human irresponsibility. Margaret, on the other hand, is drawn towards the Wilcox family and led to associate herself with the values they represent.

"If Wilcoxes hadn't worked and died in England for thousands of years, you and I couldn't sit here without having our throats cut. There would be no trains, no ships to carry us literary people about in, no fields even. Just savagery. No—perhaps not even that. Without their spirit life might never have moved out of protoplasm. More and more do I refuse to draw my income and sneer at those who guarantee it."

The dramatic action of the book develops out of the schism which takes place between the Schlegel sisters as each moves

farther along her chosen path, Margaret towards the acceptance of the "outer life," expressed in her engagement to the widowed Mr. Wilcox, and Helen towards her pursuit of a somewhat vaguely conceived "ideal." The scales are, however, heavily biased against Helen, who is used as a mere foil to her sister's maturer wisdom. The morality of the story, and the conclusion we are supposed to draw from it, are plain. "Only connect . . ." exhort's the book's epigraph; and Margaret it is, we are asked to believe, who accomplishes the connection.

In this novel, however, once again, Forster's work suffers artistically as the result of the confusion between the symbolical and the realistic treatment of his subject. A clearer and deeper mind, taking the theme of the relationship of the inner life to the outer, would manipulate somewhat different symbols from "Wilcoxes" and "Schlegels" and would then reach somewhat different conclusions from those of *Howards End*. For Forster has not in fact stated the real issue either helpfully or sincerely. What he has succeeded in doing, and in doing quite clearly enough, is to reveal, in the predetermined and therefore falsified treatment of his subject, the central predicament and equivocation inherent in the compromising liberal mentality.

The crucial falsification is not that of the characters of the Wilcoxes, who are presented honestly and objectively enough, but of the Schlegels and Leonard Bast. And it is here, perhaps, that we touch upon the psychological compulsion which inclined Forster's mind towards his admixture of the symbolical and the realistic—namely, in its effect in securing the falsification of symbolical truth necessary for the adaptation of the realities represented by the words "culture" and "poverty" to the far from disinterested preconceptions of the bourgeois liberal point of view.

"It is private life that holds out the mirror to infinity; personal intercourse, and that alone, that ever hints at a personality beyond our daily vision." Such, in Forsterian phraseology, is the Schlegel viewpoint. But suppose we grant what is so almost squeamishly proffered—that, symbolically, the Schlegels represent the inner life of personality in contrast to the outer life of organization represented by the Wilcoxes. Can there in fact ever be such a reconciliation between the two as is symbolized by Margaret's marriage to Mr. Wilcox? To speak more

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explicitly, can Culture only save itself from inward debility by an alliance with the State, can the life of the spirit maintain and strengthen itself only by a compromise with the Prince of this world? \* Is such a reconciliation, or compromise, a spiritual achievement (as it is here presented) or a betrayal?

From the spiritual, personal and cultural point of view it is clearly a betrayal; it is the equivocal and deluded attempt to serve two masters which is spoken of in the New Testament. Yet what, indeed, is this "connection," to refer back to Forster's work, but the bridging of the two worlds which were, in the earlier novels, held apart as spiritual antitheses? Twists of presentation aside, in what essential respect can the Wilcoxes be said to differ from the Pembrokes in *The Longest Journey*? Yet while, in the earlier novel, for the sake of the personal drama which is enacted, the Pembrokes are represented as something at all costs to be eschewed and shunned, in the later book, where the personal drama gives place to the social, the same type, with a few changes, is represented as admirable and to be courted.

What is the reason for this change of attitude and the decision to compromise? The answer, it is not difficult to see, lies in the weakness and invalidity of the inner life, of "the real," as conceived by Forster, which, presented in naturalistic terms, has not sufficient inner vitality to maintain itself as a centre of spiritual energy in independence of the outer region of practical life. Forster's fundamental error consists of invoking the spiritual principle and then referring it for its ultimate sanction not to God, to the supernatural—a resort which would have had the effect of thoroughly disequilibrizing Forster's mental pattern and bringing it to a new and revolutionary centrality—but to Nature. That Forster's ethical naturalism will not bear the spiritual burdens which are placed upon it we have already seen. This inability to support the personal values represented by the Schlegels by an appeal to any higher order of being than that embodied by the mundanely "mysterious" figure of the first Mrs. Wilcox with her tiresome wisp of hay (with the dew still on it) deprives the antithesis between Schlegels and Wilcoxes of its absolute character and therefore of all real value as a statement of

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\* *vide*, Chapter XXVII: "Talk as one would, *Mr. Wilcox was king of this world*, the superman, with his own morality, whose head remained in the clouds." (My italics.)

the relationship between the inner and outer realms of existence—or the realm of subjectivity and that of objectivization. For neither can the Schlegel sisters really be accepted as adequately symbolizing the life of the spirit, nor can Leonard Bast be regarded as a truthful representation of the urge towards culture unsupported by economic privilege. The Schlegels are simply what they are “realistically” represented to be—two specimens of the leisured bourgeois parasite upon culture. And all that the book leaves us with is a statement of the real relations between “cultured, sensitive and democratic liberalism” (to quote Rose Macauley’s description of the outlook with which Forster identifies himself) and the capitalistic structure of Edwardian society which permits and guarantees its harmless, ineffectual and even charming existence.

Here it is that Forster’s confusion of symbolical and realistic treatment serves the purpose of so doctoring the issue that it conforms to the pre-requirements of an outlook obviously conditioned by its liberal bourgeois background. Forster’s realistic presentation of the Schlegels enables him to get around the responsibility of declaring that his novel is an allegory of the inner life. Quite so. But if the Schlegels are only—the Schlegels, nothing more nor less, then the book is deprived of inner significance. Forster’s confused method enables him to retain the overtones of symbolical significance while presenting an apparently straightforward realistic narrative: it is no wonder that the book has been popular.

Perhaps we may exonerate Forster of the charge of sinister intent in deliberately falsifying his presentation of the Schlegels, at the price of denying them the symbolical significance which they are presumed to possess. But it is much more difficult to avoid making the charge in the case of his presentation of Leonard Bast; and there is the further reflection to which this leads; namely, that Leonard is presented in such a way as to emphasize the Schlegels’ claim to symbolical significance as the bearers of cultural values and the inner life. For the implication of Leonard’s failure, owing to inferior social advantages, to attain the inner life, is that the inner life itself is made possible only by the possession of social advantages such as those the Schlegels enjoy, and from this it follows that, in the author’s mind, the Schlegels do therefore possess symbolical significance!

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Forster's evident determination that Leonard Bast should be made to fit the preconception that culture is secondary to riches leads him to draw a portrait which is the least convincing fabrication in the book, and the one which most plainly calls into question the author's fundamental seriousness and responsibility as an artist. The wretched Leonard is a lay figure, an effigy made to walk and talk in such a way as to bolster up the Mammonish philosophy which inspires the book. For culture is *not* dependent upon wealth; it is only to the parasites of the spirit that it appears as an object which can be externally appropriated, like any other article. Nor can Forster's pressing of this point home find any response in the mind of the genuine champion of the dispossessed; for the depth of his concern with the sufferings of the underprivileged masses may be judged from the fact that it is Henry Wilcox with whom Margaret, "keen to derive the modern capitalist from the warriors and hunters of the past," "connects."

### III

With the resolution of the conflict between what is called, in *A Room With a View*, "the real and the pretended," signified by the union of the Schlegels with the Wilcoxes, the novelist's own inner thought-conflict, expressing the inner conflict which lies at the bottom of all the novels, comes to an end, and there is no longer any imperative urge towards fictional creation. Forster has exhausted his theme, and the dramatic materials are missing. More, his interest has moved outward, peripherally, from the personal drama to a concern with the generalized problems of society, and it is now possible to speak of him (*vide* Burra) as "an artist on the fringe of social reform"—not such a good position for an artist as Burra would have us think. The only way in which the novelist can finally exploit his basic situation is by transporting his mechanical dramatic apparatus to some external situation which it happens approximately and fortuitously to fit. And so, in *A Passage to India* (1924), we have the Anglo-Indian world of Turtons and Burtons on the one side and on the other that of Aziz and his compatriots, with Cyril Fielding, the liberal educationalist in between, and Mrs. Moore, the counterpart of Mrs. Wilcox, anomalously bridging both worlds. But the apparatus hardly fits the drama, which, indeed, exiguous as it is, takes place, not in the battlefield of any individual soul, but on the plane of external action and political

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issues, where it is brought only to a precarious and inconclusive termination. The conflict is external to the author's mind.

*A Passage to India* is written at the extreme edge of Forster's personal pattern. It is hard to see how any but a mechanical and inwardly meaningless work of fiction could have succeeded it, and the fact that it has been followed by silence need cause us no great surprise. Certain features of the novel, however, have an interest in the light of the interpretation of Forster which I have proposed.

If the book can be said to have a hero, that hero must be Cyril Fielding, a character who evidently embodies his creator's own outlook upon life. In Fielding we find a union of the qualities seen as separate in *Howards End*. Fielding is humane, cultured, enlightened, progressive, but he is also capable, reliable, and self-assured: he has a sense of the importance of "personal relationships" but he also has "grit" and his hands are definitely "on the ropes." Ideally, then, he should be a harmonious figure. Yet it seems that there is some dissatisfaction on his author's part with the finality of the values which he embodies.

"... he felt dubious and discontented suddenly, and wondered whether he was really and truly successful as a human being. After forty years' experience he had learnt to manage his life and make the best of it on advanced European lines, had developed his personality, explored his limitations, controlled his passions—and he had done it all without becoming either pedantic or worldly. A creditable achievement; but as the moment passed, he felt he ought to have been working at something else the whole time—he didn't know at what, never would know, never could know, and that was why he felt sad."

These feelings of dissatisfaction are again touched on at the end of the book, where Fielding is speaking to Aziz of his marriage to Mrs. Moore's daughter Stella, who, he feels, unlike himself, is "after something"—the "something," whatever it is which is included in this vague gesture, being that, evidently, which is outside the scope of his limited rationalistic scheme of life.

But the most significant factor in the novel is the emotional background provided by the Marabar Caves, around which the action centres. It is the visit of Aziz, Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested to the caves which precipitates the drama, and through-

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out the novel the echoing "*Boum—bouni*" of the caves supplies an insistent undercurrent to the moods and thoughts of the characters.

The caves' horrible echo is, however, a more elaborate repetition of something which has apparently lurked always at the edge of Forster's mind, for it has found expression in previous writings. It is indicated by the description of the infernal region in which the principal character in an early story finds himself after death, through his smug, unheroic life; and it is indicated also in the metaphor of the goblins "walking quietly over the universe" to describe the Beethoven Symphony in *Howards End*. The caves reiterate the same message of meaninglessness and nullity, but more insistently and overpoweringly. The echo murmurs: "Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value." And the terror of the Marabar lay in the fact that it "robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness, the only quality that accommodates them to mankind." Not only does the echo of the caves prolong itself throughout the story to which it provides such a menacing undertone, but it has the effect of undermining and disintegrating Mrs. Moore's hold on life, and ultimately, of destroying her. When we recollect that Mrs. Moore is to *A Passage to India* what Mrs. Wilcox is to *Howards End*—that she is the "elemental character" who represents what appears to be the highest value to which Forster can appeal to sanction his interpretation of life—the metaphorical implications of her disintegration and its occasion are ominous, to say the very least. Nor is there anything in Forster's occasional and miscellaneous writings of the past twenty years to dispel the misgivings to which a consideration of the sequence of his novels, ending on this ominous note, gives rise.



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- 1910 HOWARDS END. *Arnold.*  
1911 THE CELESTIAL OMNIBUS AND OTHER STORIES.  
*Sidgwick and Jackson.*  
1923 PHAROS AND PHARILLON. *Hogarth.*  
1924 A PASSAGE TO INDIA. *Arnold.*  
1925 ANONYMITY. *Hogarth.*  
1927 ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL. *Arnold.*  
1928 THE ETERNAL MOMENT AND OTHER STORIES.  
*Sidgwick and Jackson.*  
1931 LETTER TO M. BLANCHARD. *Hogarth.*  
1934 GOLDSWORTHY LOWES DICKINSON. *Arnold.*  
1936 ABINGER HARVEST. *Arnold.*  
1939 WHAT I BELIEVE. *Hogarth.*  
1940 NORDIC TWILIGHT. *Macmillan.*  
1942 VIRGINIA WOOLF. *Cambridge University Press.*